EREMA.

R. D. BLACKMORE.

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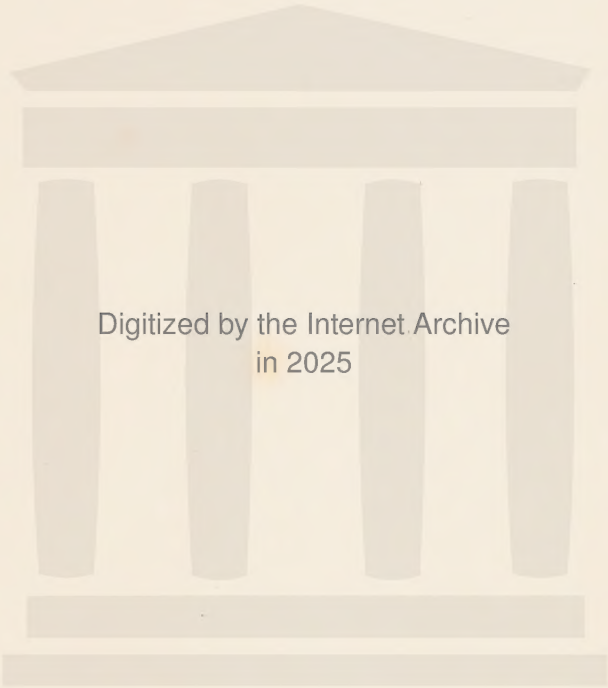
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EREMA

VOL. III.

EREMA

OR

MY FATHER'S SIN

BY

R. D. BLACKMORE

AUTHOR OF 'THE MAID OF SKER' ETC.

Κἀπὸ ματρὸς ἄφαρ βέβακεν
ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα—SOPH. *Trach.* 529

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

LONDON
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THE THIRD VOLUME.

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EREMA,

OR

MY FATHER'S SIN.

CHAPTER XLI.

A STRONG TEMPTATION.

Now it will be said, and I also knew, that there was nothing as yet, except most frail and feeble evidence, to connect that nameless stranger with the crime charged upon my father. Indeed it might be argued well that there was no evidence at all, only inference and suspicion. That, however, was no fault of mine; and I felt as sure about it as if I had seen him in the very act. And this conclusion was not mine alone; for

Mrs. Busk, a most clever woman, and the one who kept the post-office, entirely agreed with me that there could be no doubt on earth about it.

But when she went on to ask me what it was my intention to do next, for the moment I could do nothing more than inquire what her opinion was. And she told me that she must have a good night's rest before advising anything. For the thought of having such a heinous character in her own delivery district was enough to unhinge her from her postal duties, some of which might be useful to me.

With a significant glance she left me to my own thoughts, which were sad enough, and too sad to be worth recording. For Mrs. Busk had not the art of rousing people and cheering them, such as Betsy Strouss, my old nurse, had, perhaps from her knowledge of the nursery. My present landlady might be the more sagacious and sensible woman of the two, and therefore the better adviser; but for keeping one up to the mark she was not in any way equal to Betsy.

There is no ingratitude in saying this, be-

cause she herself admitted it. A clever woman, with a well-balanced mind, knows what she can do, and wherein she fails, better than a man of her own proportion does. And Mrs. Busk often lamented, without much real mortification, that she had not been 'born sympathetic.'

All the more perhaps for that she was born sagacious, which is a less pleasing, but in a bitter pinch a more really useful quality. And before I had time to think much of her defects, in the crowd of more important thought, in she came again, with a letter in her hand, and a sparkle of triumph in her small black eyes. After looking back along the passage, and closing my door, she saw that my little bay-window had its old-fashioned shutters fastened, and then, in a very low whisper, she said, 'What you want to know is here, Miss.'

'Indeed!' I answered, in my usual voice. 'How can you know that? The letter is sealed.'

'Hush! Would you have me ruined for your sake? This was at the bottom of the

Nepheton bag. It fell on the floor. That was God's will, to place it in your power.'

'It is not in my power,' I answered, whispering in my turn and staring at it in the strong temptation. 'I have no right even to look at it. It is meant for some one else, and sealed.'

'The seal is nothing. I can manage that. Another drop of wax—and I strike our stamp by accident over the breakage. I refuse to know anything about it. I am too busy with the other letters. Five minutes—lock the door—and I will come again.'

This was a desperate conflict for me, worse even than bodily danger. My first impulse was to have nothing to do with it—even to let the letter lie untouched, and, if possible, unglanced at. But already it was too late for the eyes to turn away. The address had flashed upon me before I thought of anything, and while Mrs. Busk held it up to me. And now that address was staring at me like a contemptuous challenge, while the seal, the symbol of private rights and deterrent honour, lay undermost. The letter was directed to 'H. W. C., Post-office, Newport,

Sussex.' The writing was in round-hand, and clear, so as not to demand any scrutiny, and to seem like that of a lawyer's clerk, and the envelope was of thin repellent blue.

My second impulse was to break the letter open and read it without shrinking. Public duty must conquer private scruples. Nothing but the hand of Providence itself could have placed this deadly secret in my power so amazingly. Away with all squeamishness, and perhaps prevent more murder.

But that 'perhaps' gave me sudden pause. I had caught up the letter and stood near the candle to soften the wax and lift the cover with a small sharp paper-knife, when it flashed on my mind that my cousin would condemn and scorn what I was doing. Unconsciously I must have made him now my standard of human judgment, or what made me think of him at that moment? I threw down the letter, and then I knew. The image of Lord Castlewood had crossed my mind, because the initials were his own—those of Herbert William Castlewood. This strange coincidence—if it were,

indeed, an accident—once more set me thinking. Might not this letter be from his agent of whom he had spoken as my protector here, but to whom as all unseen I scarcely ever gave a thought? Might not young Stixon, who so often was at Bruntsea, be employed to call at Newport for such letters, and return with them to his master? It was not very likely, for my cousin had the strongest contempt of anonymous doings. Still it was possible, and the bare possibility doubled my reluctance to break the seal.

For one minute longer I stood in doubt, and then honour and candour and truth prevailed. If any other life had been in peril but my own, duty to another might have overridden all. But duty to oneself, if overpushed in such a case, would hold some taint of cowardice. So I threw the letter, with a sense of loathing, on a chair. Whatever it might contain it should pass, at least for me, inviolate.

Now when Mrs. Busk came to see what I had done, or rather left undone, she flew into a towering passion, until she had no time to go

on with it. The rattle of the rickety old mail-cart, on its way to Winchester that night, was heard, and the horn of the driver as he passed the church.

'Give it me. A' mercy! A young natural, that you are!' the good woman cried, as she flung out of the room to dash her office stamp upon that hateful missive, and to seal the leathern bag. 'Seal indeed! Inviolate! How many seals have I got to make every day of my life?'

I heard a great thump from the corner of the shop, where the business of the mails was conducted; and she told me afterwards that she was so put out that broken that seal should be, one way or another. Accordingly she smashed it with the office-stamp, which was rather like a woman's act, methought; and then, having broken it, she never looked inside—which perhaps was even more so.

When she recovered her leisure and serenity and came in, to forgive me and be forgiven, we resolved to dismiss the moral aspect of the question, as we never should agree about it,

although Mrs. Busk was not so certain as she had been when she found that the initials were the initials of a lord. And then I asked her how she came to fix upon that letter among so many others, and to feel so sure that it came from my treacherous enemy.

'In the first place, I know every letter from Nepheton,' she answered, very sensibly. 'There are only fourteen people that write letters in the place, and twelve of those fourteen buy their paper in my shop—there is no shop at all at Nepheton. In the next place, none of them could write a hand like that, except the parson and the doctor, who are far above disguise. And two other things made me certain as could be. That letter was written at the 'Green Man' alehouse; not on their paper, nor yet with their ink; but being in great hurry, it was dusted with their sand, a sand that turns red upon ink, Miss. And the time of dispatch there is just what he would catch by walking fast after his dig where you saw him, going in that direction too, and then having his materials ready to save time. And if all that is not

enough to convince you, Miss—you remember that you told me our old sexton's tale?'

'To be sure I do. The first evening I was left alone here. And you have been so kind, there is nothing I would hide from you.'

'Well, Miss, the time of old Jacob's tale is fixed by the death of poor old Sally Mock; and the stranger came again after you were here, just before the death of the miller's eldest daughter, and you might almost have seen him. Poor thing; we all called her the "flower of the Moon," meaning our little river. What a fine young woman she was, to be sure! Whenever we heard of any strangers about, we thought they were prowling after her. I was invited to her funeral, and I went, and nothing could be done nicer. But they never will be punctual with burials here; they like to dwell on them, and keep the bell going, for the sake of the body, and the souls that must come after it. And so when it was done I was twenty minutes late for the up-mail and the cross-country post, and had to move my hands pretty sharp, I can assure you. That doesn't

matter; I got through it, with the driver of the cart obliging, by means of some beer and cold bacon. But what I feared most was the Nepheton bag, having seen the old man at the funeral, and knowing what they do afterwards. I could not return him "too late" again, or he would lose his place for certain, and a shilling a day made all the difference to him, between wife and no wife. The old pair without it must go to the workhouse, and never see one another. However, when I was despairing quite of him, up he comes with his bag quite correct, but only one letter to sort in it, and that letter was, Miss, the very identical of the one you held in your hands just now. And a letter as like it as two peas had come when we buried old Sally. It puzzled me then, but I had no clue to it; only now you see, putting this and that together, the things we behold must have some meaning for us; and to let them go without it is against the will of God, especially when at the bottom of the bag.'

'If you hear so soon of any stranger in the

valley,' I asked, to escape the re-opening of the opening question, 'how can that man come and go—a man of remarkable stature and appearance —without anybody asking who he is?'

'You scarcely could have put it better, Miss, for me to give the answer. They do ask who he is, and they want to know it, and would like anybody to tell them. But being of a different breed, as they are, from all outside the long valley, speaking also with a different voice, they fear to talk so freely out of their own ways and places. Anything they can learn in and out among themselves, they will learn; but anything out of that they let go, in the sense of outlandish matter. Bless you, Miss, if your poor grandfather had been shot anywhere else in England, how different it would have been for him!'

'For us, you mean, Mrs. Busk. Do you think the man who did it had that in his mind?'

'Not unless he knew the place, as few know it. No; that was an accident of his luck, as many other things have been. But the best luck stops at last, Miss Erema; and unless I am

very much mistaken, you will be the stop of his. I shall find out, in a few days, where he came from, where he stayed, and when he went away. I suppose you mean to let him go away?'

'What else am I to do?' I asked; 'I have no evidence at all against him, only my own ideas. The police would scarcely take it up, even if——'

'Oh, don't talk of them. They spoil everything. And none of our people would say a word, or care to help us, if it came to that. The police are all strangers, and our people hate them. And, indeed, I believe that the worst thing ever done was the meddling of that old Jobbins. The old stupe is still alive at Petersfield, and as pompous-headed as ever. My father would have been the man for your sad affair, Miss, if the police had only been invented in his time. Ah, yes, he was sharp! Not a Moonstock man—you may take your oath of that, Miss—but a good honest native from Essex. But he married my mother, a Moonstock woman; or they would not put up with me here at all. You quality people have your ideas to hold by, and despise all others, and reasonable in your

opinions; but you know nothing—nothing—nothing—of the stiffness of the people under you.'

'How should I know anything of that?' I answered; 'all these things are new to me. I have not been brought up in this country, as you know. I come from a larger land, where your stiffness may have burst out into roughness, from having so much room suddenly. But tell me what you think now your father would have done in such a case as mine is?'

'Miss Erema, he was that long-headed that nobody could play leapfrog with him. None of them ever cleared over his barrel. He walked into this village fifty-five years back, this very month, with his spade upon his shoulder and the knowledge of everybody in his eye. They all put up against him, but they never put him down; and in less than three months he went to church, I do assure you, with the only daughter of the only baker. After that he went into the baking line himself; he turned his spade into a shovel, as he said, and he introduced new practices.'

'Oh, Mrs. Busk, not adulteration?'

'No, Miss, no! The very last thing he would think of. Only the good use of potatoes in the bread, when flour was frightful bad and painful dear. What is the best meal of the day he used to reason? Dinner! And why? Why, because of the potatoes! If I can make people take potato for their breakfast, and potato for their supper, too, I am giving them three meals a day instead of one. And the health of the village corresponded to it.'

'Oh, but, Mrs. Busk, he might have made them do it, by persuasion, or at least with their own knowledge——'

'No, Miss, no! The whole nature of our people, Moonstock or out of it, is never to take victuals by any sort of persuasion. If St. Paul was to come and preach, "Eat this or that," all I had of it in the shop would go rotten. They hate any meddling with their likings, and they suspect doctor's rubbish in all of it.'

'I am quite of their opinion,' I replied, 'and I am glad to hear of their independence. I always used to hear that in England none of the poor people dared have a will of their own.'

Mrs. Busk lifted up her hands to express amazement at my ignorance, and said that she 'must run away, and put the shutters up; or else the policeman would come rapping, and look for a glass of beer, which he had no right to, till it came to the bottom of the firkin; and this one was only tapped last Sunday week. Don't you ever think of the police, Miss?'

Probably this was good advice, and it quite agreed with the opinions of others, and my own impressions as to the arrogant lethargy of 'the force,' as they call themselves, in my father's case. Mrs. Busk had more activity and intelligence in her little head than all the fat sergeants and inspectors of the country, helmet, belt, and staff and all.

CHAPTER XLII.

MASTER WITHYPOOL.

At first I was much inclined to run for help, or at least for counsel, either to Lord Castlewood or to Major Hockin; but further consideration kept me from doing anything of the kind. In the first place, neither of them would do much good; for my cousin's ill-health would prevent him from helping me, even if his strange view of the case did not; while the excellent Major was much too hot and hasty for a delicate task like this. And again, I might lose the most valuable and important of all chances by being away from the spot just now. And so I remained at Shoxford for awhile, keeping strict watch upon the stranger's haunt, and asking about him by means of Mrs. Busk.

'I have heard more about him, Miss,' she said one day, when the down-letters had been

despatched, which happened about middle-day. He has been here only those three times this summer, upon excuse of fishing always. He stays at old Wellham, about five miles down the river, where the people are not true Moonites. And one thing that puzzles them is, that although he puts up there simply for the angling, he always chooses times when the water is so low that to catch fish is next to impossible. He left his fishing quarters upon the very day after you saw him searching so; and he spoke as if he did not mean to come again this season. And they say that they don't want him neither, he is such a morose, close-fisted man; and drinking nothing but water, there is very little profit with him.'

'And did you find out what his name is? How cleverly you have managed!'

'He passes by the name of "Captain Brown;" but the landlord of his inn, who has been an old soldier, is sure he was never in the army, nor any other branch of the service. He thinks that he lives by inventing things, for he is always at some experiments, and one of

his great points is to make a lamp that will burn and move about under water. To be sure you see the object of that, Miss?'

'No, really, Mrs. Busk, I cannot. I have not your penetration.'

'Why, of course, to find what he cannot find upon land. There is something of great importance there, either for its value or its meaning. Have you ever been told that your poor grandfather wore any diamonds or precious jewels?'

'No. I have asked about that most especially. He had nothing about him to tempt a robber. He was a very strong-willed man, and he hated outward trumpery.'

'Then it must be something that this man himself has dropped, unless it were a document, or any other token, missing from his lordship. And few things of that sort would last for twenty years almost.'

'Nineteen years, the day after to-morrow,' I answered, with a glance at my pocket-book. 'I determined to be here on that very day. No doubt I am very superstitious. But one thing

I cannot understand is this—what reason can there have been for his letting so many years pass, and then hunting like this?'

'No one can answer that question, Miss, without knowing more than we know. But many reasons might be supposed. He might have been roving abroad, for instance, just as you and your father have been. Or he might not have known that the thing was there; or it might not have been of importance till lately. Or he might have been afraid, until something else happened. Does he know that you are now in England?'

'How can I possibly tell, Mrs. Busk? He seems to know a great deal too much. He found me out when I was at Colonel Gundry's. At least I conclude so, from what I know now, but I hope he does not know'—and at such a dreadful idea, I shuddered.

'I am almost sure that he cannot know it,' the good postmistress answered, 'or he would have found means to put an end to you. That would have been his first object.'

'But, Mrs. Busk,' I said, being much dis-

turbed by her calmness; 'surely, surely he is not to be allowed to make an end of every one! I came to this country with the full intention of going into everything. But I did not mean at all, except in my very best moments, to sacrifice myself. It seems too bad—too bad to think of.'

'So it is, Miss Erema,' Mrs. Busk replied, without any congenial excitement; 'it does seem hard for them that have the liability on them. But still, Miss, you have always shown such a high sense of duty, and of what you were about——'

'I can't, I cannot. There are times, I do assure you, when I am fit for nothing, Mrs. Busk, and wish myself back in America. And if this man is to have it all his own way——'

'Not he, Miss. Not he. Be you in no hurry. Could he even have his way with our old miller? No, Master Withypool was too many for him.'

'That is a new thing. You never told me that. What did he try to do with the miller?'

'I don't justly know what it was, Miss

Erema; I never spoke to miller about it; and indeed I have had no time since I heard of it. But those that told me said that the tall strange gentleman was terribly put out, and left the gate with a black cloud upon his face, and the very next day the miller's daughter died, quite sudden and mysterious.'

'How very strange! But now I have got a new idea. Has the miller a strong high dam to his pond? And a good stout sluice-gate at the end?'

'Yes, Miss, to be sure he has,' said Mrs. Busk; 'otherwise how could he grind at all, when the river is so low as it is sometimes?'

'Then I know what he wanted; and I will take a leaf out of his own book—the miscreant! He wanted the miller to stop back the water, and leave the pool dry at the "Murder-bridge." Would it be possible for him to do that?'

'I cannot tell you, Miss; but your thought is very clever. It is likely enough that he did want that; though he never would dare to ask without some pretence—some other cause, I mean, to show for it. He may have been

thinking that whatever he was wanting was likely to be under water. And that shows another thing, if it is so.'

'Mrs. Busk, my head goes round with such a host of complications. I do my best to think them out—and then there comes another!'

'No, Miss; this only clears things up a little. If the man cannot be sure whether what he is looking for is on land or under water, it seems to me almost to show that it was lost at the murder-time, in the dark and flurry. A man would know, if he dropped anything in the water by daylight, from the splash and the ripple, and so on, for the stream is quite slow at that corner. He dropped it, Miss, when he did the deed, or else it came away from his lordship.'

'Nothing was lost, as I said before, from the body of my grandfather; so far at least as our knowledge goes. Whatever was lost was the murderer's. Now please to tell me all about the miller, and how I may get round him.'

'You make me laugh in the middle of black things, Miss, by the way you have of putting them. But as to the miller—Master Withypool

is a wonder, as concerns the ladies. He is one of those men that stand up for everything, when a man tries upper side of them. But let a woman come, and get up under, and there he is—a piecrust lifted. Why I, at my age, could get round him, as you call it. But you, Miss—and more than that, you are something like his daughter; and the old man frets after her terrible. Go you into his yard, and just smile upon him, Miss; and if the Moon-river can be stopped, he'll stop it for you.'

This seemed a very easy way to do it. But I told Mrs. Busk that I would pay well also, for the loss of a day's work at the mill was more than fifty smiles could make up.

But she told me, above all things, not to do that. For old Master Withypool was of that sort that he would stand for an hour with his hands in his pocket for a halfpenny if not justly owing from him. But nothing more angered him than a bribe to step outside of his duty. He had plenty of money, and was proud of it. But sooner would he lose a day's work, to do a kindness, when he was sure of having right

behind it, than take a week's profit without earning it. And very likely that was where the dark man failed, from presuming that money would do everything. However, there was nothing like judging for oneself, and if I would like to be introduced, she could do it for me with the best effect; taking as she did a good hundred-weight of best 'households' from him every week, although not herself in the baking line, but always keeping quartern bags, because the new baker did adulterate so.

I thought of her father, and how things work round; but that they would do without remarks of mine. So I said nothing on that point, but asked whether Master Withypool would require any introduction. And to this Mrs. Busk said, 'Oh, dear no!' And her throat had been a little rough since Sunday, and the dog was chained tight, even if any dog would bite a sweet young lady; and to her mind the miller would be more taken up, and less fit to vapour into obstacles, if I were to hit upon him all alone, just when he came out to the bank of his cabbage-garden, not so very long after his dinner, to smoke his pipe and to see his things a-growing.

It was time to get ready if I meant to catch him then, for he always dined at one o'clock, and the mill was some three or four meadows up the stream ; therefore as soon as Mrs. Busk had re-assured me that she was quite certain of my enemy's departure, I took my drawing things, and set forth to call upon Master Withypool.

Passing through the churchyard, which was my nearest way, and glancing sadly at the ' fairy ring,' I began to have some uneasiness about the possible issue of my new scheme. Such a thing required more thinking out than I had given to it. For instance, what reason could I give the miller for asking so strange a thing of him ? And how could the whole of the valley be hindered from making the greatest talk about the stoppage of their own beloved Moon, even if the Moon could be stopped without every one of them rushing down to see it? And if it was so talked of, would it not be certain to come to the ears of that awful man ? And if so, how long before he found me out, and sent me to rejoin my family ?

These thoughts compelled me to be more

discreet; and having lately done a most honourable thing, in refusing to read that letter, I felt a certain right to play a little trick now of a purely harmless character. I ran back therefore to my writing-desk, and took from its secret drawer a beautiful golden American eagle, a large coin, larger and handsomer than any in the English coinage. Uncle Sam gave it to me, on my birthday; and I would not have taken 50*l.* for it. With this I hurried to that bridge of fear, which I had not yet brought myself to go across; and then, not to tell any story about it, I snipped a little hole in the corner of my pocket, while my hand was still steady ere I had to mount the bridge. Then pinching that hole up with a squeeze, I ran, and got upon that wicked bridge, and then let go. The heavy gold coin fell upon the rotten plank, and happily rolled into the water, as if it were glad not to tempt its makers to any more sin for the sake of it.

Shutting up thought, for fear of despising myself for the coinage of such a little trick, I hurried across the long meadow to the mill,

and went through the cow-gate into the yard, and the dog began to bark at me. Seeing that he had a strong chain on, I regarded him with lofty indignation. 'Do you know what Jowler would do to you?' I said; 'Jowler, a dog worth ten of you. He would take you by the neck, and drop you into that pond, for daring to insult his mistress!' The dog appeared to feel the force of my remarks; for he lay down again, and with one eye watched me, in a manner amusing, but insidious. Then taking good care to keep out of his reach, I went to the mill-pond, and examined it.

It looked like a very nice pond indeed, long, and large, and well banked up, not made into any particular shape, but producing little rushy elbows. The water was now rather low, and very bright (though the Moon itself is not a crystal stream), and a school of young minnows just watching a water-spider with desirous awe, at sight of me broke away, and reunited, with a speed and precision that might shame the whole of our very best modern fighting. Then many other things made a dart away, and

furrowed the shadow of the willows; till distance quieted the fear of man—that most mysterious thing in nature—and the shallow pool was at peace again and bright with unruffled reflections.

'What ails the dog?' said a deep, gruff voice, and the poor dog received a contemptuous push, not enough to hurt him, but to wound his feelings, for doing his primary duty. 'Servant, Miss! What can I do for you? Footpath is t'other side of that there hedge.'

'Yes, but I left the footpath on purpose. I came to have a talk with you, if you will allow me.'

'Sartain! sartain!' the miller replied, lifting a broad floury hat and showing a large grey head. 'Will you come into house, Miss, or into gearden?'

I chose the garden, and he led the way, and set me down upon an old oak bench, where the tinkle of the water through the flood-gates could be heard.

'So you be come to paint the mill at last,' he said. 'Many a time I've looked out for

you. The young leddy down to Mother Busk's, of course. Many's the time we've longed for you to come, you reminds us so of somebody. Why, my old missus can't set eyes on you in church, Miss, without being forced to sit down a'most. But we thought it very pretty of you not to come, Miss, while the trouble was so new upon us.'

Something in my look or voice made the old man often turn away, while I told him that I would make the very best drawing of his mill that I could manage, and would beg him to accept it.

'Her ought to a' been on the plank,' he said, with trouble in getting his words out. 'But there—what good? Her never will stand on that plank no more. No, nor any other plank.'

I told him that I would put her on the plank, if he had any portrait of her, showing her dress and her attitude. Without saying what he had, he led me to the house, and stood behind me, while I went inside. And then he could not keep his voice, as I went from one

picture of his darling to another, not thinking (as I should have done) of what his feelings might be; but trying, as no two were at all alike, to extract a general idea of her.

'Nobody knows what her were to me,' the old man said, with a quiet little noise, and a sniff behind my shoulder. 'And with one day's illness, her died—her died.'

'But you have others left. She was not the only one. Please, Mr. Withypool, to try to think of that. And your dear wife still alive, to share your trouble. Just think for a moment of what happened to my father. His wife and six children all swept off in a month —and I just born, to be brought up with a bottle!'

I never meant, of course, to have said a word of this; but was carried away by that common old idea of consoling great sorrow with a greater one. And the sense of my imprudence broke vexatiously upon me, when the old man came and stood between me and his daughter's portraits.

'Well, I never!' he exclaimed, with his

bright eyes steadfast with amazement. 'I know you now, Miss. Now I knows you. To think what a set of blind newts us must be! And you the very moral of your poor father, in a female kind of way! To be sure, how well I knew the Captain! A nicer man never walked the earth, neither a more unlucky one.'

'I beg you—let me beg you,' I began to say; 'since you have found me out like this——'

'Hush, Miss, hush! Not my own wife shall know, unless your own tongue telleth her. A proud man I shall be, Miss Raumur,' he continued with emphasis on my local name, 'if aught can be found in my power to serve you. Why, Lord bless you, Miss,' he whispered, looking round, 'your father and I has spent hours together! He were that pleasant in his ways and words, he would drop in from his fishing, when the water was too low, and sit on that very same bench where you sat, and smoke his pipe with me, and tell me about battles and ask me about bread. And many a time I have slipped up the gate, to give him more water for

his flies to play, and the fish not to see him so plainly. Ah, we have had many pleasant spells together; and his eldest boy and girl, Master George, and Miss Henrietta, used to come and fetch our eggs. My Polly then was in love with him, we said; she sat upon his lap so, when she were two years old, and played with his beautiful hair, and blubbered—oh she did blubber when the Captain went away.'

This invested Polly with new interest for me, and made me determine to spare no pains in putting her pretty figure well upon the plank. Then I said to the miller, 'How kind of you to draw up your sluice-gates to oblige my father! Now will you put them down and keep them down, to do a great service both to him and me?'

Without a moment's hesitation he promised that anything he could do should be done, if I would only tell him what I wanted. But perhaps it would be better to have our talk outside. Taking this hint, I followed him back to the bench in the open garden, and there explained what I wished to have done, and no longer

concealed the true reason. The good miller answered that with all his heart he would do that much to oblige me, and a hundred times more than that; but some little thought and care were needful. With the river so low as it was now, he could easily stop the back-water, and receive the whole of the current in his dam, and keep it from flowing down his wheel-trough, and thus dry the lower channel for perhaps half-an-hour, which would be ample for my purpose. Engineering difficulties there were none; but two or three other things must be heeded. Miller Sims, a mile or so down river, must be settled with, to fill his dam well, and begin to discharge, when the upper water failed; so as not to dry the Moon all down the valley, which would have caused a commotion. Miller Sims being own brother-in-law to Master Withypool, that could be arranged easily enough, after one day's notice. But a harder thing to manage would be to do the business without rousing curiosity, and setting abroad a rumour which would be sure to reach my enemy. And the hardest thing of all, said Master Withypool,

smiling as he thought of what himself had once been, would be to keep those blessed boys away, who find out everything and go everywhere. Not a boy of Shoxford but would be in the river or dancing upon its empty bed, screeching and scolloping up into his cap any poor bewildered trout chased into the puddles, if it were allowed to leak out, however feebly, that the Moon water was to stop running. And then how was I to seek for anything?

This was a puzzle. But, with counsel, we did solve it. And we quietly stopped the Moon, without man or boy being much the wiser.

CHAPTER XLIII.

GOING TO THE BOTTOM.

It is not needful to explain everything, any more than it was for me to tell the miller about my golden eagle, and how I had managed to lose it in the Moon—a trick of which now I was heartily ashamed, in the face of honest kindness. So I need not tell how Master Withypool managed to settle with his men, and to keep the boys unwitting of what was about to come to pass. Enough that I got a note from him to tell me that the little river would be run out, just when all Shoxford was intent upon its dinner, on the second day after I had seen him. And he could not say for certain, but thought it pretty safe, that nobody would come near me, if I managed to be there, at a quarter before one, when the stream would begin to run dry, and I could watch it. I sent

back a line by the pretty little girl, a sister of poor Polly, to say how much I thanked him, and how much I hoped that he himself would meet me there, if his time allowed. For he had been too delicate to say a word of that; but I felt that he had a good right to be there, and, knowing him now, I was not afraid.

Nearly everything came about as well as could be wished almost. Master Withypool took the precaution, early in the morning, to set his great fierce bull at large, who always stopped the footpath. This bull knew well the powers of a valley in conducting sound; and he loved to stand, as if at the mouth of a funnel, and roar down it to another bull, a mile below him, belonging to his master's brother-in-law. And when he did this, there was scarcely a boy, much less a man or woman, with any desire to assert against him the public right of thoroughfare. Throughout that forenoon then this bull bellowed nobly, still finding many very wicked flies about: so that two mitching boys, who meant to fish for minnows with a pin, were obliged to run away again.

However, I was in the dark about him, and as much afraid of him as anybody, when he broke into sight of me round a corner, without any tokens of amity. I had seen a great many great bulls before, including Uncle Sam's good black one, who might not have meant any mischief at all, and atoned for it—if he did—by being washed away so.

And therefore my courage soon returned, when it became quite clear that this animal now had been fastened with a rope and could come no nearer. For some little time then I waited all alone, as near that bridge as I could bring myself to stand, for Mrs. Busk, my landlady, could not leave the house yet, on account of the mid-day letters. Moreover, she thought that she had better stay away, as our object was to do things as quietly as could be.

Much as I had watched this bridge from a distance, or from my sheltering-place, I had never been able to bring myself to make any kind of sketch of it, or even to insert it in a landscape; although it was very well suited and expressive, from its crooked and antique

simplicity. The overhanging also of the hawthorn tree (not ruddy yet, but russety with its colouring crop of coral) and the shaggy freaks of ivy above the twisted trunk, and the curve of the meadows and bold elbow of the brook, were such as an artist would have pitched his tent for, and tantalised poor London people with a dream of cool repose.

As yet the little river showed no signs of doing what the rustic—or surely it should have been the cockney—was supposed to stand still and wait for. There was no great rush of headlong water, for that is not the manner of the stream in the very worst of weather; but there was the usual style of coming on, with lips and steps at the side, and cords of running towards the middle. Quite enough at any rate to make the trout jump without any omen of impending drought, and to keep all the play and the sway of movement going on serenely.

I began to be afraid that the miller must have failed in his stratagem against the water-god, and that, as I had read in Pope's Homer, the liquid deity would beat the hero; when all

of a sudden there were signs that man was the master of this little rustic. Broadswords of flag and rapiers of water-grass, which had been quivering merrily, began to hang down and to dip themselves in loops; and the stones of the brink showed dark green stripes on their sides, as they stood naked. Then fine little cakes of conglomerated stuff, which only a great man of nature could describe, came floating about, and curdling into corners, and holding on to one another in long-tailed strings. But they might do what they liked, and make their very best of it, as they fell away to nothing upon stones and mud. For now more important things began to open, the like of which never had been yielded up before; plots of slimy gravel, varied with long streaks of yellow mud, dotted with large double shells, and parted into little oozy runs by wriggling water-weeds. And here was great commotion and sad panic of the fish, large fellows splashing and quite jumping out of water, as their favourite hovers and shelves ran dry, and darting away with their poor backs in the air, to the deepest hole they could think of.

Hundreds must have come to flour, lard, and butter, if boys had been there to take advantage. But luckily things had been done so well that boys were now in their least injurious moment destroying nothing worse than their own dinners.

A very little way below the old wooden bridge the little river ran into a deepish pool, as generally happens at or near a corner, especially where there is a confluence sometimes. And seeing nothing, as I began to search intently, stirring with a long-handled spud which I had brought, I concluded that even my golden eagle had been carried into that deep place. However, water or no water, I resolved to have it out with that dark pool as soon as the rest of the channel should be drained, which took a tormenting time to do; and having thick boots on, I pinned up my skirts, and jumping down into the shoals, began to paddle, in a fashion which reminded me of childish days passed pleasantly in the Blue River.

Too busy thus to give a thought to any other thing, I did not even see the miller, until he said—

'Good day, Miss,' lifting his hat, with a nice kind smile; 'very busy, Miss, I see, and right you are to be so. The water will be upon us again in less than half-an-hour. Now let me clear away they black weeds for you. I brought this little shivel a' purpose. If I may make so bold, Miss, what do 'e look to find here?'

'I have not the very smallest notion,' I could only answer; 'but if there is anything, it must be in that hole. I have searched all the shallow part so closely that I doubt whether even a sixpence could escape me, unless it were buried in the mud or pebbles. Oh, how can I manage to search that hole; there must be a yard of water there?'

'One thing I ought to have told told 'e for to do,' Master Withypool whispered, as he went on shovelling—'to do what the boys do when they lose a farden—to send another after 'un. If so be now, afore the water was run out, you had stood on that there bridge and dropped a bright coin into it, a new half-crown, or a two-shilling piece, why the chances would be that

the run of the current would a' taken it nigh to the likeliest spot for holding any other little matter as might a' dropped, permiskous you might say, into this same water.'

'I have done so,' I answered; 'I have done that very thing, though not at all with that object. The day before yesterday a beautiful coin, a golden eagle of America, fell from my pocket on that upper plank, and rolled into the water. I would not lose it for a great deal, because it was given to me by my dearest friend, the greatest of all millers.'

'And ha'n't you found it yet, Miss? Well, that is queer. Perhaps we shall find it now, with something to the back of it. I thought yon hole was too far below the bridge. But there your gold must be, and something else most likely. Plaise to wait a little bit, and us'll have the wet out of 'un. I never should 'a thought of that but for your gold guinea, though.'

With these words Master Withypool pulled his coat off, and rolled up his shirt-sleeves, displaying arms fit to hold their own even with

Uncle Sam's almost; and then he fell to with his shovel and dug, while I ran with my little spud to help.

'Plaise keep out of way, Miss; I be afeard of knocking you. Not but what you works very brave, indeed, Miss.'

Knowing what men are concerning 'female efforts,' I got out of the strong man's way, although there was plenty of room for me. What he wanted to do was plain enough—to dig a trench down the empty bed of the Moon river, deep enough to drain that pit, before the stream came down again.

'Never thought to run a race against my own old dam,' he said, as he stopped for a moment to recover breath. 'Us never knows what us may have to do. Old dam must be a'most busting now. But her's sound enough, till her beginneth to run over.'

I did not say a word, because it might have done some mischief; but I could not help looking rather anxiously upstream, for fear of the water coming down with a rush, as it very soon must do. Master Withypool had been working,

not as I myself would have done, from the lips of the dark pit downward; but from a steep run some twenty yards below, where there was almost a little cascade, when the river was full flowing; from this he had made a channel upward, cutting deeper as he came along, till now at the brink of the obstinate pool, his trench was two feet deep almost. I had no idea that any man could work so with a shovel, which seems such a clumsy tool compared with a spade; but a gentleman who knows the country and the people told me that, with their native weapon, Moonites will do as much digging in an hour as other folk get through in an hour and a half with a spade. But this may be only, perhaps, because they are working harder.

'Now,' said Master Withypool at last, standing up, with a very red face, and desiring to keep all that unheeded; 'now, Miss, to you it belongeth to tap this here little cornder, if desirable. Plaise to excoose of me going up of bank to tell 'e when the wet cometh down again.'

'Please to do nothing of the sort,' I answered, knowing that he offered to stand out of sight from a delicate dread of intrusion; 'please to tap the pool yourself, and stay here, as a witness of what we find in it.'

'As you plaise, Miss, as you plaise. Not a moment for to lose in arguing. Hearken now, the water is a-topping of our dam. Her will be here in five minutes.'

With three or four rapid turns of his shovel, which he spun almost as fast as a housemaid spins a mop, he fetched out the plug of earth severing his channel from the deep reluctant hole. And then I saw the wisdom of his way of working, for if he had dug downward from the pool itself, the water would have followed him all the way, and even drowned his tool out of its own strokes. Whereas now, with a swirl and a curl of ropy mud, away rushed the thick, sluggish, obstinate fluid; and in less than two minutes the hole was almost dry.

The first thing I saw was my golden eagle, lodged about half way down the slope, on a crust of black sludge, from which I caught it

up, and presented it to Master Withypool, as a small token and record of his kindness; and to this day he carries it upon his Sunday watch-chain.

'I always am lucky in finding things,' I exclaimed, while he watched me, and the up-stream too, whence a babble of water was approaching; 'as sure as I live I have found it!'

'No doubt about your living, Miss. And the Captain were always lively. But what have your bright eyes hit upon? I see nort for the life of me.'

'Look there,' I cried, 'at the very bottom of it—almost under the water. Here, where I put my spud—a bright blue line! Oh, can I go down, or is it quicksand?'

'No quicksand in our little river, Miss. But your father's daughter shannot go into the muck, while John Withypool stands by. I see un now, sure enough; now I see un! But her needeth care, or her may all goo away in mullock. Well, I thought my eyes was sharp enough; but I'm blest if I should have

spied that, though. A bit of flint, mebbe, or of blue glass bottle. Anyhow, us will see the bottom of un.'

He was wasting no time while he spoke, but working steadfastly for his purpose, fixing the blade of his shovel below the little blue line I was peering at, so that no slip of the soft yellow slush should bury it down, and plunge over it. If that had once happened, good-bye to all chance of ever beholding this thing again, for the river was coming with fury and foam, to assert its ancient right of way.

With a short laugh the miller jumped down into the pit. 'Me to be served so, by my own mill-stream! Lor', if I dont pay you out for this!'

His righteous wrath failed to stop the water from pouring into the pit behind him; and, strong as he was, he nearly lost his footing, having only mud to stand upon. It seemed to me that he was going to be drowned, and I offered him the handle of my spud to help him; but he stopped where he was, and was not going to be hurried.

'I got un now,' he said; 'now I don't mind coming out. You see if I don't pay you out for this! Why, I always took you for a reasonable hanimal!'

He shook his fist strongly at the river, which had him well up to the middle by this time; and then he disdainfully waded out, with wrath in all his countenance.

'I've a great mind to stop there, and see what her would do,' he said to me, forgetting altogether what he went for. 'And I would, if I had had my dinner. A scant of a thing as I can manage with my thumb! Ah, you have made a bad day of it.'

'But what have you found, Mr. Withypool?' I asked, for I could not enter into his wrath against the water, wet as he was to the shoulders. 'You have something in your hand. May I see it, if you please? And then do please go home and change your clothes.'

'A thing I never did in my life, Miss, and should be ashamed to begin at this age. Clothes gets wet, and clothes dries on us, same as un did on the sheep afore us; else they gets stiff and

creasy. What this little thing is ne'er abody may tell, in my line of life—but look'th aristocratic.'

The 'mullock,' as he called it, from his hands, and from the bed where it had lain so long, so crusted the little thing which he gave me, that I dipped it again in the swelling stream, and rubbed it with both hands, to make out what it was. And then I thought how long it had lain there; and suddenly to my memory it came, that in all likelihood the time of that was nineteen years this very day.

'Will another year pass,' I cried, 'before I make out all about it? What are you, and who, now looking at me with such sad, sad eyes?'

For I held in my hand a most handsome locket, of blue enamel and diamonds, with a back of chased gold, and in front the miniature of a beautiful young woman, done as they never seem to do them now. The work was so good, and the fitting so close, that no drop of water had entered, and the face shone through

the crystal glass as fresh as the day it was painted. A very lovely face it was, yet touched with a shade of sadness, as the loveliest faces generally are; and the first thought of any beholder would be—'that woman was born for sorrow.'

The miller said as much, when I showed it to him.

'Lord bless my heart! I hope the poor craitur' hathn't lasted half so long as her pictur' hath.'

CHAPTER XLIV.

HERMETICALLY SEALED.

The discovery which I have described above (but not half so well as the miller tells it now) created in my young heart a feeling of really strong curiosity. To begin with, how could this valuable thing have got into the Moon stream, and lain there so long, unsought for, or at best so unskilfully sought for? What connection could it have with the tragic death of my grandfather? Why was that man so tardily come to search for it, if he might do so without anybody near him? Again, what woman was this whose beauty no water or mud could even manage to disguise? That last was a most disturbing question to one's bodily peace of mind. And then came another yet more urgent—what was in the inside of this tight case?

That there was something inside of it seemed almost a certainty. The mere value of the trinket, or even the fear that it ever might turn up as evidence, would scarcely have brought that man so often, to stir suspicion by seeking it. Though after so long a time he well might hope that suspicion was dead and buried. And being unable to open this case—after breaking three good nails over it, and then the point of a penknife—I turned to Master Withypool, who was stamping on the grass to drain himself.

'What sort of a man was that,' I asked, 'who wanted you to do what now you have so kindly done for me? About a month or six weeks ago? Do please to tell me, as nearly as you can.'

If Mrs. Withypool had been there she might have lost all patience with me, for putting long questions so selfishly to a man who had done so much for me, and whose clothes were now dripping in a wind which had arisen, to test his theory of drying. He must have lost a large quantity of what scientific people

call 'caloric.' But never a shiver gave he in exchange.

'Well, Miss,' he said; 'I was thinking a'most of speaking on that very matter. More particular since you found that little thing, with the pretty lady inside of it. It were borne in on my mind that thissom were the very thing he were arter.'

'No doubt of it,' I answered, with far less patience, though being comparatively dry. 'But what was he like? Was he like this portrait?'

'This picture of the lady? No; I can't say that he were, so much. The face of a big man he hath, with short, black fringes to it. Never showeth to my idea any likeliness of a woman. No, no, Miss; think you not at all that you have got him in that blue thing. Though some of their pictures is like men, the way they buttons up nowadays.'

'I did not mean that it was meant for him; what I mean is, do you see any sign of family likeness? Any resemblance about the eyes, or mouth, or forehead?'

'Well, now I don't know but what I might,' replied Mr. Withypool, gazing very hard; 'if I was to look at un long enough a' might find some'at favouring of that tall fellow, I do believe. Indeed, I do believe the more I look the more I diskivers the image of him.'

The good and kind miller's perception of the likeness strengthened almost too fast, as if the wish were father to the thought, until I saw clearly how selfish I was in keeping him in that state so long; for I knew, from what Mrs. Busk had told me, that in spite of all his large and grand old English sentiments about his clothes, his wife would make him change them all, ere ever she gave him a bit of dinner, and would force him then to take a glass of something hot. So I gave him a thousand thanks, though not a thousandth part of what he deserved, and saw him well on his homeward way before I went back to consider things.

As soon as my landlady was at leisure to come in and talk with me, and as soon as I

had told her how things happened, and shown her our discovery, we both of us did the very same thing, and said almost the very same words. Our act was, with finger, and nail, and eye, to rime into every jot of it; and our words were—

'I am sure there is something inside. If not, it would open sensibly.'

In the most senseless and obstinate manner it refused not only to open, but to disclose anything at all about itself. Whether it ever had been meant to open, and if so where, and by what means—whether without any gift of opening it might have a hidden thing inside—whether, when opened by force or skill, it might show something we had no business with, or (which would be far worse) nothing at all—good Mrs. Busk and myself tested, tapped, and felt, and blew, and listened, and tried every possible overture, and became at last quite put out with it.

'It is all of a piece with the villains that owned it,' the post-mistress exclaimed at last. 'There is no penetrating either it or them.

Most likely they have made away with this beautiful lady on the cover. Kill one, kill fifty, I have heard say. I hope Master Withypool will let out nothing; or evil it will be for you, Miss. If I was you, I would carry a pistol.'

'Now, please not to frighten me, Mrs. Busk. I am not very brave at the best of times; and this has made me so nervous. If I carried a pistol, I should shoot myself the very first hour of wearing it. The mere thought of it makes me tremble. Oh why was I ever born, to do man's work?'

'Because, Miss, a man would not have done it half so well. When you saw that villain digging, a man would have rushed out and spoiled all chance. And now what man could have ever found this? Would Master Withypool ever have emptied the Moon river for a man, do you think? Or could any man have been down among us, all this time, in this jealous place, without his business being long ago sifted out, and scattered over him? No, no, Miss, you must not talk like that—and with me as well to help you. The rogues will

have reason to wish, I do believe, that they had only got a man to deal with.'

In this argument there were points which had occurred to me before; but certainly it is a comfort to have one's own ideas, in a doubtful matter, reproduced, and perhaps put better, by a mind to which one may have lent them perhaps, with a loan all unacknowledged. However, trouble teaches care, and does it so well that the master and the lesson in usage of words are now the same; therefore I showed no sign of being suggested with my own suggestions, but only asked quietly 'What am I to do?'

'My dear young lady,' Mrs. Busk replied, after stopping some time to think of it; 'my own opinion is, for my part, that you ought to consult somebody.'

'But I am, Mrs. Busk. I am now consulting you.'

'Then I think, Miss, that this precious case should be taken at once to a jeweller, who can open it without doing any damage, which is more than we can do.'

'To be sure; I have thought of that,' I replied; 'but how can that be done without arousing curiosity? Without the jeweller seeing its contents, if indeed it has any? And in that case the matter would be no longer at our own disposal, as now it is. I have a great mind to split it with a hammer. What are the diamonds to me?'

'It is not the diamonds but the picture, Miss, that may be most important. And more than that, you might ruin the contents, so as not to make head or tail of them. No, no; it is a risk that must be run; we must have a jeweller, but not one of this neighbourhood.'

'Then I shall have to go to London again, and perhaps lose something most important here. Can you think of no other way out of it?'

'No, Miss, at present I see nothing else—unless you will place it all in the hands of the police.'

'Constable Jobbins to wit, or his son! No, thank you, Mrs. Busk, not yet. Surely we are not quite reduced to such a hopeless pass as

that. My father knew what the police were worth, and so does Betsy, and so does Major Hockin. "Pompous noodles," the Major calls them, who lay hold of everything by the wrong end.'

'Then if he can lay hold of the right end, Miss, what better could you do than consult him?'

I had been thinking of this already, and pride alone debarred me. That gentleman's active nature drove him to interfere with other people's business, even though he had never heard of them; and yet through some strange reasoning of his own, or blind adoption of public unreason, he had made me dislike, or at any rate not like him; until he began to show signs at last of changing his opinion. And now the question was—had he done that enough for me, without loss of self-respect, to open my heart to him and seek counsel?

In settling that point the necessity of the case overrode perhaps some scruples; in sooth, I had nobody else to go to. What could I do with Lord Castlewood? Nothing; all his de-

sire was to do exactly what my father would have done; and my father had never done anything more than rove and roam his life out. To my mind this was dreadful now, when every new thing rising round me more and more clearly to my mind established what I never had doubted—his innocence. Again, what good could I do by seeking Betsy's opinion about it, or that of Mrs. Price, or Stixon, or any other person I could think of? None whatever—and perhaps much harm. Taking all in all, as things turn up, I believed myself to be almost equal to the cleverest of those three in sense, and in courage not inferior. Moreover, a sort of pride—perhaps very small, but not contemptible—put me against throwing my affairs so much into the hands of servants.

For this idea Uncle Sam, no doubt the most liberal of men, would perhaps condemn me. But still I was not of the grand new world, whose pedigrees are arithmetic (at least with many of its items, though the true Uncle Sam was the last for that); neither could I

come up to the largeness of universal brotherhood. That was not to be expected of a female; and few things make a man more angry than for his wife to aspire to it. No such ideas had ever troubled me; I had more important things to think of, or at any rate something to be better carried out. And of all these desultory thoughts it came that I packed up that odious, but very lovely, locket, without further attempt to unriddle it, and persuaded my very good and clever Mrs. Busk to let me start right early. By so doing I could have three hours with a good gentleman always in a hurry, and yet return for the night to Shoxford, if he should advise me so.

Men and women seem alike to love to have their counsels taken; and the equinox being now gone by, Mrs. Busk was ready to begin, before the tardy sun was up, who begins to give short measure at once when he finds the weights go against him. Mrs. Busk considered not the sun, neither any of his doings. The time of day was more momentous than any of the sun's proceedings. Railway time

was what she had to keep (unless a good customer dropped in), and as for the sun—'clock slow, clock fast' in the almanacs showed how he managed things; and if that was not enough, who could trust him to keep time after what he had done upon the dial of Ahaz? Reasoning thus—if reason it was—she packed me off in a fly for the nearest railway station, and by midday I found the Major labouring on his ramparts.

After proper salutations, I could not help expressing wonder at the rapid rise of things. Houses here and houses there, springing up like children's teeth, three or four in a row together, and then a long gap, and then some more. And down the slope, a grand hotel, open for refreshment, though as yet it had no roof on; for the Major, in virtue of his charter, defied all the magistrates to stop him from selling whatever was saleable on or off the premises. But noblest and grandest of all to look at, was the 'Bruntsea Athenæum, Lyceum, Assembly Room, Institution for Mutual Instruction, Christian Young Men's Congress, and

Sanitary, Saline, Hydropathic Hall, at nominal prices, to be had gratis.'

'How you do surprise me!' I said to Major Hockin, after reading all that, which he kindly requested me to do with care; 'but where are the people to come from?'

'Erema,' he replied, as if that question had been asked too often; 'you have not had time to study the laws of political economy—the noblest of noble sciences. The first of incontrovertible facts is, that supply creates demand. Now ask yourself whether there could even be a Yankee if ideas like yours had occurred to Columbus.'

This was beyond me; for I never could argue, and strove to the utmost not to do so. 'You understand those things, and I do not,' said I, with a smile, which pleased him; 'my dear Aunt Mary always says that you are the cleverest man in the world; and she must know most about it.'

'Partiality! partiality!' cried the Major, with a laugh, and pulling his front hair up. 'Such things pass by me like the idle wind; or

rather perhaps they sadden me from my sense of my own deficiencies. But bless me—dinner must be waiting! Look at that fellow's trowel —he knows; he turns up the point of it like a spoon. They say that he can smell his dinner two miles off. We all dine at one o'clock now, that I may rout up every man-Jack of them.'

The Major sounded a steam guard's whistle, and led me off in the rapidly vanishing wake of his hungry workmen.

CHAPTER XLV.

CONVICTION.

Sir Montague Hockin, to my great delight, was still away from Bruntsea. If he had been there, it would have been a most awkward thing for me to meet him, or to refuse to do so. The latter course would probably have been the one forced upon me by self-respect and affection towards my cousin; and yet, if so, I could scarcely have avoided an explanation with my host. From the nature of the subject, and several other reasons, this would have been most unpleasant; and even now I was haunted with doubts, as I had been from the first, whether I ought not to have told Mrs. Hockin long ago what had been said of him. At first sight that seemed the honest thing to do; but three things made against it. It might seem forward and meddlesome; it

must be a grievous thing to my cousin to have his sad story discussed again; and, lastly, I had promised Mrs. Price that her words should go no further. So that on the whole perhaps I acted aright in keeping that infamous tale to myself, as long as ever it was possible.

But now ere ever I spoke of him—which I was always loth to do—Mrs. Hockin told me that he very seldom came to see them now, and when he did come he seemed to be uneasy, and rather strange in his manners. I thought to myself that the cause of this was clear. Sir Montague, knowing that I went to Castlewood, was pricked in his conscience, and afraid of having his vile behaviour to my cousin disclosed. However, that idea of mine was wrong, and a faulty conception of simple youth. The wicked forgive themselves so quickly, if even they find any need of it, that everybody else is supposed to do the same. With this I have no patience. A wrong unrepented of and unatoned gathers interest, instead of getting discount, from lost time. And so I hated that man tenfold.

Good Mrs. Hockin lamented his absence, not only for the sake of her darling fowls, but also because she considered him a check upon the Major's enterprise. Great as her faith was in her husband's ability and keenness, she was often visited with dark misgivings about such heavy outlay. Of economy (as she often said) she certainly ought to know something, having had to practise it as strictly as anybody in the kingdom from an age she could hardly remember. But as for what was now brought forward as a great discovery—economy in politics—Mrs. Hockin had tried to follow great opinions, but could only find, so far, downright extravagance. Supply (as she had observed fifty times with her own butcher and fishmonger), instead of creating demand, produced a lot of people lounging round the corner, till the price came down to nothing. And if it were so with their institutions—as her dear husband called his new public-house—who was to find all the interest due to the building and land societies? Truly she felt that Sir Rufus Hockin, instead of doing any good to them,

had behaved very oddly in leaving them land, and not even a shilling to work it with.

It relieved her much to tell me this, once for all and in strict confidence; because her fine old-fashioned (and we now may say quite obsolete) idea of duty towards her husband forbade her ever to say to him or about him when it could be helped, anything he might not like, anything which to an evil mind might convey a desire on her part to meddle with—with——

'Political economy,' I said; and she laughed, and said, yes, that was just it. The Major of course knew best, and she ought with all her heart to trust him not to burden their old days with debt, after all the children they had brought up and fairly educated, upon the professional income of a distinguished British officer, who is not intended by his superiors to provide successors.

'Perhaps it is like the boiled eggs they send me,' the old lady said, with her soft, sweet smile, 'for my poor hens to sit upon. Their race is too good to be made common. So now

they get tinkers' and tailors' boys, after much competition, and the crammed sons of cooks. And in peace-time they do just as well.'

Of such things I knew nothing; but she seemed to speak with bitterness, the last thing to be found in all her nature, yet discoverable —as all bad things (except its own) are—by the British Government. I do not speak from my own case, in which they discovered nothing.

By the time these things had been discussed, my host (who was always particular about his dress) came down to dinner, and not until that was over could I speak of the subject which had brought me there. No sooner had I begun my tale than they both perceived that it must neither be flurried nor interrupted, least of all should it be overheard.

'Come into my lock-up,' cried the Major; 'or, better still, let us go out of doors. We can sit in my snuggery on the cliff, with only gulls and jackdaws to listen, and mount my telescope, and hoist my flag, and the men know better than to skulk their work. I can see

every son of a gun of them as clearly as if I had them on parade. You wish Mrs. Hockin to come, I suppose. Very well, let us be off at once. I shall count my fellows coming back from dinner.'

With a short, quick step the Major led the way to a beautifully situated outpost, at a corner of the cliff, where land and sea for many a fair league rolled below. A niche of the chalk had been cleverly enlarged and scooped into a shell-shaped bower, not indeed gloriously overhung, as in the Far West might have been, but broken of its white defiant glare by climbing and wandering verdure. Seats and slabs of oak were fixed to check excess of chalkiness, and a parapet of a pattern which the Major called Egyptian saved fear of falling down the cliff, and served to spread a paper on or to rest a telescope.

'From this point,' said the Major, crossing wiry yet substantial legs, 'the whole of my little domain may be comprised as in a bird's-eye view. It is nothing of course, much less than nothing, compared with the Earl of Crow-

combe's or the estate of Viscount Gamberley; still, such as it is, it carries my ideas, and it has an extent of marine frontage such as they might envy. We are asked 5*l.* per foot for a thread of land fronting on a highway, open to every kind of annoyance, overlooked, without anything to look at. How much then per fathom (or measure, if you please, by cable-lengths) is land worth fronting the noble, silent, uncontaminating, healthful sea? Whence can come no costermongers' cries, no agitating skirl of bagpipes, or the maddening hurdy-gurdy, no German band expecting half-a-crown for the creation of insanity; only sweet murmur of the wavelets, and the melodious whistle of a boat-man catching your breakfast lobster. Where, again, if you love the picturesque——'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Hockin gently, 'you always were eloquent from the first day I saw you; and if you reconstitute our borough, as you hope, and enter Parliament for Bruntsea, what a sensation you will create! But I wished to draw your attention to the fact that Erema is waiting to tell her tale.'

'To be sure. I will not stop her. Eloquence is waste of time, and I never yet had half a second to spare. Fear no eloquence from me; facts and logic are my strong points; and now, Erema, show what yours are.'

At first this made me a little timid, for I had never thought that any strong points would be needed for telling a simple tale. To my mind the difficulty was—not to tell the story, but to know what to make of it when told, and soon I forgot all about myself in telling what I had seen, heard, and found.

The Major could not keep himself from stamping great holes through his—something I forget the name of, but people sow it to make turf of chalk—and dear 'Aunt Mary's' soft pink cheeks, which her last grandchild might envy, deepened to a tone of rose; while her eyes, so full of heavenly faith when she got upon lofty subjects, took a most human flash and sparkle of hatred not theological.

'Seven!' she cried; 'oh Nicholas, Nicholas, you never told me there were seven!'

'There were not seven graves without the

mother,' the Major answered sternly. 'And what odds whether seven or seventy? The criminality is the point, not the accumulation of results. Still, I never heard of so big a blackguard. And what did he do next, my dear?'

The way in which they took my story was a great surprise to me; because, although they were so good, they had never paid any attention to it until it became exciting. They listened with mere politeness until the scent of a very wicked man began to taint my narrative; but from that moment they drew nearer, and tightened their lips, and held their breath, and let no word escape them. It made me almost think that people, even of pure excellence, weaned as they are from wicked things by teaching and long practice, must still retain a hankering for them done at other people's cost.

'And now,' cried the Major, 'let us see it;' even before I had time to pull it out, though ready to be quick from a knowledge of his ways. 'Show it, and you shall have my opinion. And Mary's is certain to agree with

mine. My dear, that makes yours so priceless.'

'Then, Nicholas, if I retain my own, yours is of no value. Never mind that. Now don't catch words, or neither opinion will be worth a thought. My dear, let us see it, and then judge.'

'My own idea, but not so well expressed,' Major Hockin answered, as he danced about; while I with stupid haste was tugging at my package of the hateful locket. For I had not allowed that deceitful thing any quarters in my pocket, where dear little relics of my father lay, but had fastened it under my dress in a manner intended in no way for gentlemen to think about. Such little things annoy one's comfort, and destroy one's power of being quite high-minded. However, I got it out at last, and a flash of the sun made the difference.

'Brilliants, Mary!' the Major cried; 'brilliants of first water; such as we saw, you know where; and any officer in the British army, except myself, I do believe, would have had them at once in his camlet pouch—my

dear, you know all about it. Bless my heart, how slow you are! Is it possible you have forgotten it? There came out a fellow, and I cut him down, as my duty was, without ceremony. You know how I used to do it, out of regulation, with a slash like this——'

'Oh Nicholas, you will be over the cliff! You have shown me how you used to do it a thousand times—but you had no cricks in your back then—and remember how brittle the chalk is.'

'The chalk may be brittle, but I am tough. I insist upon doing everything as well as I did it forty years ago. Mary, you ought not to speak to me like that. Eighteen, nineteen, twenty brilliants, worth 20*l.* a-piece upon an average, I do believe. Four hundred pounds. That would finish our hotel.'

'Nicholas!'

'My dear, I was only in fun. Erema understands me. But who is this beautiful lady?'

'The very point,' I exclaimed, while he held it so that the pensive beauty of the face gleamed

in soft relief among bright blue enamel and sparkling gems. 'The very thing that I must know—that I would give my life to know—that I have fifty thousand fancies——'

'Now don't be excited, Erema, if you please. What will you give me to tell you who it is?'

'All those diamonds, which I hate the sight of, and three-quarters of my half-nugget; and if that is not enough——'

'It is a thousand times too much; I will tell you for just one smile, and I know it will be a smile of unbelief.'

'No, no, I will believe it, whoever you say,' with excitement superior to grammar, I cried; 'only tell me at once—don't be so long.'

'But then you won't believe me when I do tell you,' the Major replied in the most provoking way. 'I shall tell you the last person you would ever think of, and then you will only laugh at me.'

'I won't laugh; how can I laugh in such a matter? I will believe you if you say it is—Aunt Mary.'

'My dear, you had better say at once that it is I, and have no more mystery about it.' Mrs. Hockin was almost as impatient as myself.

'Mrs. Hockin you must indeed entertain an exalted idea of your own charms. I knew that you were vain, but certainly did not—well then, if you will allow me no peace—this is the lady that lives down in the ruin, and stands like a pillar by my pillar-box.'

'I never thought you would joke like that,' I cried, with vexation and anger. 'Oh, is it a subject to be joked about?'

'I never was graver in my life; and you promised implicitly to believe me. At any rate believe that I speak in earnest.'

'That I must believe when you tell me so. But what makes you think such a wonderful thing? I should have thought nothing more impossible. I had made up my mind that it was Flittamore, who lived down here; but this cannot be she. Flittamore was unheard of at the time of my grandfather's death. Moreover, her character was not like this; she was giddy,

and light, and heartless. This lady had a heart —good or bad—a deep one. Most certainly it is not Flittamore.'

'Flittamore! I do not remember that name. You should either tell us all or tell us nothing.' The Major's tone was reproachful, and his eyes from their angular roofs looked fierce.

'I have not told you,' I said, 'because it can have nothing to do with it. The subject is a painful one, and belongs to my family only.'

'Enough. I am not inquisitive—on the other hand, too forgetful. I have an appointment at 3.25. It takes me seven minutes and a quarter to get there. I must be two minutes and three-quarters late. Mrs. Hockin, mount the big telescope, and point it at the ramparts; keep the flag up also. Those fellows will be certain that I am up here, while I enfilade them from the western end with this fine binocular. Surprises maintain discipline. Good-bye, my dear, and Miss Castlewood, good-bye. Tea at 6.30, and not too much water.'

CHAPTER XLVI.

VAIN ZEAL.

Leaving his telescope levelled at the men, the Major marched off with his opera-glass, in a consciously provoking style, and Mrs. Hockin most heartily joined me in condemning such behaviour. In a minute or two, however, she would not have one word said against him, and the tide of her mind (as befits a married woman) was beyond all science. So that the drift of all words came back to her husband's extraordinary merits. And certainly these, if at all like her description, deserved to be dwelt upon at very precious periods.

However, I had heard enough of them before, for the Major himself was not mute upon this point, though comparatively modest, and oftentimes deprecating praise, ere ever he received it. And so I brought Mrs. Hockin

back at last to talk about the lady who was living in the ruin.

'It is not quite a ruin,' she said; 'my dear husband is fond of picturesque expressions. However, it is not in very good repair; and being unable to get possession of it, through some legal quibble, possibly he may look at it from a rather unfavourable point of view. And for the same reason—though he is so purely just—he may have formed a bad opinion of the strange individual who lives there. What right has she to be living without his leave upon his own manor? But there she is, and she does not care for us or anybody. She fetches all she wants, she speaks to none, and if anybody calls for rates or taxes, or any other public intrusion, they may knock and knock, but never get in, and at last they go away again.'

'But surely that cannot go on for ever. Bruntsea is such an enlightened place.'

'Our part of it is; but the rest quite benighted. As the man says—I forget his name, but the man that misunderstands us so—his contention is that 'Desolate Hole,' as the Major

calls it, although in the middle of our land, is entirely distinct from it. My husband never will put up with that; his love of justice is far too strong; and he means to have a law-suit. But still he has reasons for not beginning yet; and he puts up with a great deal, I am sure. It is too bad for them to tease him so.'

'It does seem a very sad thing,' I replied; 'and the poor soul living there all alone! Even in the summer it is bad enough; but whatever will she do when the winter comes? Why the sea, in bad weather, must be almost in upon her! And the roar of the pebbles all night! Major Hockin will never allow her to stay there.'

'What can he do when he cannot get in, and they even deny his title? I assure you, Erema, I have sent down cream, and even a dozen of my precious eggs, with the lady of the manor's compliments; but instead of being grateful, they were never taken in; and my Polly, "Miss Polly Hopkins," you know, very wisely took it all to her grandmother.'

'To her grandmother, instead of mine, as

the Major facetiously calls her. And now he says this is her portrait; and instead of giving his reasons, runs away! Really you must excuse me, Aunt Mary, for thinking that your good husband has a little too much upon his mind sometimes.'

The old lady laughed, as I loved to see her do. 'Well, my dear, after that, I think you had better have it out with him. He comes home to tea at 6.30, which used to be half-past six in my days. He is very tired then, though he never will allow it, and it would not be fair to attack him. I give him a mutton-chop, or two poached eggs, or some other trifle of nourishment. And then I make him doze for an hour and a half, to soothe his agitated intellect. And when he wakes, he has just one glass of hot water and sugar, with a little Lochnagar. And then he is equal to anything—backgammon, bezique, or even conversation.'

Impatient as I was, I saw nothing better; and by this time I was becoming used to what all of us must put up with—the long postponement of our heavy cares to the light conveni-

ence of others. Major Hockin might just as well have stopped, when he saw how anxious I was. Uncle Sam would have stopped the mill itself, with a dozen customers waiting; but no doubt he had spoiled me; and even that should not make me bitter. Aunt Mary and I understood one another. We gazed away over the breadth of the sea and the gleam of its texture, and we held our peace.

Few things are more surprising than the calm way in which ripe age looks on at things which ought to amaze it. And yet any little one of its own concerns grows more important perhaps than ever, as the shadow of the future dwindles. Major Hockin had found on the beach a pebble, with a streak of agate in it; he took it as the harbinger of countless agates, and resolved to set up a lapidary, with a tent, or even a shop perhaps, not to pay, but to be advertised, and catch distinguished visitors.

'Erema, you are a mighty finder; you found the biggest nugget yet discovered. You know about stones from the Rocky Mountains, or at least the Sierra Nevada. You did not

discover this beautiful agate, but you saw and greatly admired it. We might say that a "young lady eminent for great skill in lithology, famed as the discoverer, &c."—hold it between your eyes and this candle, but wet it in the slop-basin first; now you see the magnificent veins of blue.'

'I see nothing of the kind,' I said, for really it was too bad of him; 'it seems to me a dirty bit of the commonest flint you could pick up.'

This vexed him more than I wished to have done, and I could not help being sorry; for he went into a little fit of sulks, and Aunt Mary almost frowned at me. But he could not stay long in that condition, and after his doze and his glass, he came forth as lively and meddlesome as ever. And the first thing he did was to ask me for the locket.

'Open it?' he cried; why of course I can; there is never any difficulty about that. The finest workmanship in the world is that of the Indian jewellers. I have been among them often, I know all their devices and mechanism,

of which the European are bad copies. I have only to look round this thing twice, and then pronounce my Sesame.'

'My dear, then look round it as fast as you can,' said his wife, with a traitorous smile at me; 'and we won't breathe a Sess, till it flies asunder.'

'Mary, Miss Castlewood makes you pert, although herself so well conducted. However I do not hesitate to say that I will open this case in two minutes.'

'Of course you will, dear,' Mrs. Hockin replied, with provoking acquiescence. 'The Major never fails, Erema, in anything he is so sure about; and this is a mere child's toy to him. Well, dear, have you done it? But I need not ask. Oh, let us see what is inside of it!'

'I have not done it yet, Mrs. Hockin; and if you talk with such rapidity, of course you throw me out. How can I command my thoughts, or even recall my experience?'

'Hush! Now hush, Erema! And I myself will hush most reverently.'

'You have no reverence in you, and no patience. Do you expect me to do such a job in one second? Do you take me for a common jeweller? I beg you to remember——'

'Well, my dear, I remember only what you told us. You were to turn it round twice, you know, and then cry Sesame. Erema, was it not so?'

'I never said anything of the sort. What I said was simply this—however, to reason with ladies is rude; I shall just be off to my study.'

'Where you keep your tools, my darling,' Mrs. Hockin said softly after him; 'at least, I mean, when you know where they are.'

I was astonished at Aunt Mary's power of being so highly provoking, and still more at her having the heart to employ it. But she knew best what her husband was; and to worship for ever is not wise:

'Go and knock at his door in about five minutes,' Mrs. Hockin said to me, with some mischief in her eyes. 'If he continues to fail, he may possibly take a shorter way with it. And with his tools so close at hand——'

'Oh,' I exclaimed, 'his geological hammer —that dreadful crusher—may I go at once? I detest that thing, but I cannot have it smashed.'

'He will not break it up, my dear, without your leave. He never would think of such a thing of course. However, you may as well go after him.'

It was wrong of Mrs. Hockin to make me do this; and I felt quite ashamed of myself when I saw the kind old Major sitting by his lamp, and wrinkling his forehead into locks and keys of puzzle, but using violence to his own mind alone. And I was the more ashamed when, instead of resenting my intrusion, he came to meet me, and led me to his chair, and placed the jewelled trinket in my hand, and said—'My dear, I give it up. I was wrong in taking it away from you. You must consult some one wiser.'

'That odious thing!' I answered, being touched by this unusual humility of his; 'you shall not give it up; and I know no wiser person. A lapidary's tricks are below your knowledge.

But if you are not tired of me and offended, may I leave it to you to get it opened?'

'I would like nothing better,' he replied, recovering his natural briskness and importance; 'but you ought to be there, my dear; you must be there. Are you sure that you ought not rather to take it to your good cousin, Lord Castlewood? Now, think before you answer.'

'I need not think twice of that, Major Hockin. Good and learned as my father's cousin is, he has distinctly refused to help me, for some mysterious reason of his own, in searching into this question. Indeed, my great hope is to do it without him—for all that I know, he might even wish to thwart me.'

'Enough, my dear; it shall be just as you wish. I brought you to England, and I will stand by you. My cousin, Colonel Gundry, has committed you to me. I have no patience with malefactors. I never took this matter up, for very many reasons; and among them not the least was, that Sampson, your beloved 'Uncle Sam,' thought it better not to do so.

But if you desire it, and now that I feel certain that an infamous wrong has been done to you —which I heartily beg your pardon for my doubt of—by the Lord of all justice, everything else may go to the devil till I see it out. Do you desire it, Erema?'

'I certainly do not wish that any of your great works should be neglected. But if, without that, you can give me your strong help, my only difficulty will be to thank you.'

'I like plain speaking, and you always speak plainly; sometimes too plainly,' he said, recollecting little times when he had the worst of it; 'how far do you trust me now?'

'Major Hockin, I trust you altogether. You may make mistakes, as all men do——'

'Yes, yes, yes. About my own affairs; but I never do that for other people. I pay a bill for twopence, if it is my own. If I am trustee of it, I pay three-halfpence.'

His meaning was a little beyond me now; but it seemed better not to tell him so; for he loved to explain his own figures of speech, even when he had no time to spare for it. And he

clearly expected me to ask him to begin; or at least it seemed so from his eyebrows. But that only came home to me afterwards.

'Please not to speak of my affairs like that,' I said, as if I were quite stupid; 'I mean to pay fourpence for every twopence both to friends and enemies.'

'You are a queer girl; I have always said so. You turn things to your own ideas so. However, we must put up with that, though none of my daughters have ever done it; for which I am truly thankful. But now there is very little time to lose. The meaning of this thing must be cleared up at once. And there is another thing to be done as well, quite as important in my opinion. I will go to London with you to-morrow, if you like. My clever little Cornishman will see to things here, the man that sets up all the angles.'

'But why should I hurry you to London so?' I asked. 'Surely any good country jeweller could manage it? Or let us break it open.'

'On no account,' he answered; 'we might

spoil it all; besides, the great risk to the diamonds, which are very brittle things. To London we must take it, for this reason—the closure of this case is no jeweller's work, of that I have quite convinced myself. It is the work of a first-rate lapidary; and the same sort of man must undo it.'

To this I agreed quite readily, because of such things I knew nothing; whereas my host spoke just as if he had been brought up to both those walks of art. And then I put a question which had long been burning on my tongue.

'What made you imagine, Major Hockin, that this very beautiful face could have ever been that of the old lady living in the ruin?'

'In Desolate Hole? I will tell you at once; and then call it, if you like, an imagination. Of all the features of the human face there is none more distinctive than the eyebrow. "Distinctive" is not exactly what I mean—I mean more permanently marked and clear. The eyes change, the nose changes, so does the mouth, and even the shape of the forehead sometimes; but the eyebrows change

very little, except in colour. This I have noticed, because my own may perhaps be a little peculiar; and they have always been so. At school I received a nickname about it, for boys are much sharper than men about such things; and that name after fifty years fits as well as ever. You may smile, if you like; I shall not tell you what it was, but leave you to re-invent it, if you can. Now look at this first-rate miniature. Do you see an unusual but not uncomely formation of the eyebrows?'

'Certainly I do; though I did not observe it, until you drew my attention. I had only regarded the face as a whole.'

'The face, as a whole, is undoubtedly fine. But the eyebrows have a peculiar arch, and the least little turn at the lower end, as if they designed to rise again. The lady of Desolate Hole has the same.'

'But how can you tell? How very strange! I thought she let nobody see her face.'

'You are perfectly right about that, Erema; so far at least as she has vouchsafed to exhibit her countenance to me. Other people

may be more fortunate. But when I met her for the second time, being curious already about her, I ventured to offer my services, with my inborn chivalry, at a place where the tide was running up, and threatened to surround her. My politeness was not appreciated, as too often is the case; for she made me a very stiff bow, and turned away. Her face had been covered by the muffler of her cloak, as if the sea breeze were too much for her; and she did not even raise her eyes. But before she turned away I obtained a good glance at her eyebrows—and they were formed like these.'

'But her age, Major Hockin! Her age—what is it?'

'Upon that proverbially delicate point I can tell you but little, Erema. Perhaps, however, I may safely say that she cannot be much under twenty.'

'It is not right to provoke me so. You call her "the old woman," and compare her to your letter-box. You must have some idea—is she seventy?'

'Certainly not, I should say; though she cannot expect me to defend her, when she will not show her face to me; and what is far worse, at my time of life, she won't even pay me a halfpenny of rent. Now let us go back to Aunt Mary, my dear; she always insists upon packing over night.'

CHAPTER XLVII.

CADMEIAN VICTORY.

Before two o'clock of the following day Major Hockin and myself were in London, and ready to stay there for two or three days, if it should prove needful. Before leaving Bruntsea I had written briefly to Lord Castlewood, telling him that important matters had taken me away from Shoxford, and as soon as I could explain them, I would come and tell him all about it. This was done only through fear of his being annoyed at my independence.

From London Bridge the Major took a cab direct to Clerkenwell; and again I observed that of all his joys one of the keenest was to match his wits against a cabman's. 'A regular muff, this time,' he said, as he jerked up and down with his usual delight in displaying great knowledge of London; 'no sport to be had

out of him. Why he stared at me when I said "Rosamond Street," and made me stick on "Clerkenwell." Now here he is taking us down Snow Hill, when he should have been crossing Smithfield! Smithfield, cabby, Smithfield!'

'Certain, Sir, Smiffle, if you gives the order;' and he turned the poor horse again, and took us up the hill, and among a great number of barriers. 'No thoroughfare, no thoroughfare,' on all hands stretched across us; but the cabman threaded his way between, till he came to the brink of a precipice. The horse seemed quite ready, like a Roman, to leap down it, seeing nothing less desirable than his present mode of life, till a man with a pick-axe stopped him.

'What are you at?' cried the Major, with fury equalled by nothing except his fright. 'Erema, untie my big rattan. Quick —quick——'

'Captain,' said the cabman, coolly, 'I must have another shilling for this job. A hextra mile and a quarter, to your orders. You

knows Lunnon so much better. Smiffle stopped—new railway—new meat-market—never heered of that now, did you?'

'You scoundrel, drive straight to the nearest police office.'

'Must jump this little ditch, then, Captain. Five pun' fine for you when we gets there. Hold on inside, old gentleman. Kuck, kuck, Bob, you was a hunter once. It aint more than fifty feet deep, my boy.'

'Turn round, turn round, I tell you, turn round. If your neck is forfeit, you rogue, mine is not. I never was so taken in in my life!' Major Hockin continued to rave, as amid many jeers we retreated humbly, and the driver looked in at us with a gentle grin; 'and I thought he was so soft, you know. Erema, may I swear at him?'

'On no account,' I said. 'Why, after all, it is only a shilling, and the loss of time. And then you can always reflect that you have discharged, as you say, a public duty, by protesting against a vile system.'

'Protesting is very well, when it pays,' the

Major answered gloomily; 'but to pay for protesting is another pair of shoes.'

This made him cross, and he grew quite fierce when the cabman smote him for eight pence more. 'Four parcels on the roof,' Captain,' he said, looking as only a cabman can look at his money, and spinning his extra shilling. 'Twopence each under new hact, you know. Scarcely thought a hofficer would 'a tried evasion.'

'You consummate scoundrel—and you dress yourself like a countryman! I'll have your badge indorsed, I'll have your license marked. Erema, pay the thief; it is more than I can do.'

'Captain, your address, if you please. I shall summon you for scurrilous language, as the hact directs. Ah, you do right to be driven to a pawn-shop!'

Triumphantly he drove off, while the Major cried, 'Never tie up my rattan again. Oh, it was Mrs. Hockin, was it? What a fool I was not to stop on my own manor!'

'I pray you to disdain such low impu-

dence,' I said, for I could not bear to see him shake like that, and grieved to have brought him into it. 'You have beaten fifty of them—a hundred of them—I have heard you say.'

'Certainly I have, my dear; but I had no Bruntsea then, and could not afford to pay the rogues. That makes me feel it so bitterly, so loftily, and so righteously. To be treated like this, when I think of all my labours for the benefit of the rascally human race. My Institute, my Lyceum, my Mutual Improvement Association, my Christian Young Men's something——there is no institution, after all, to be compared to the treadmill.'

Recovering himself with this fine conclusion, he led me down a little sloping alley, scarcely wide enough for a wheelbarrow, to an old black door, where we set down our parcels; for he had taken his, while I carried mine; and not knowing what might happen yet, like a true peace-maker, I stuck to the sheaf of umbrellas and the rattan-cane. And thankful I was, and so might be the cabman, to have that weapon nicely sheathed with silk.

Major Hockin's breath was short, through too much talking without action; and he waited for a minute at this door to come back to his equanimity. And I thought that our female breath falls short for the very opposite reason—when we do too much and talk too little, which happily seldom happens.

He was not long in coming back to his usual sprightliness and decision. And it was no small relief to me, who was looking at him miserably, and longing that his wife was there, through that very sad one-and-eightpence, when he pulled out a key, which he always carried, as signor and lord of Bruntsea, the key of the town-hall which had survived lock, door, and walls by centuries, and therewith struck a door which must have reminded that key of its fine old youth.

Before he had knocked so very many times, the door was opened by a young man wearing an apron and a brown paper cap, who knew Major Hockin at once, and showed us upstairs to a long, low workshop. Here were many wheels, and plates, and cylinders revolving, by

energy of a strap which came through the floor, and went through the ceiling. And the young man told us to be careful how we walked, for fear of getting entangled. Several men, wearing paper caps and aprons of leather or baize, were sitting doing dexterous work, no doubt, and doing it very easily, and the master of them all was hissing over some fine touch of jewel, as a groom does at a horse. Then seeing us, he dropped his holders, and threw a leather upon his large lens, and came and took us to a little side-room.

'Are you not afraid to leave them?' asked the Major, 'they may secrete some gems, Mr. Handkin.'

'Never,' said the lapidary, with some pride. 'I could trust these men with the Koh-i-noor; which we could have done better, I believe, than it was done by the Hollanders. But we don't get the chance to do much in diamonds, through the old superstition about Amsterdam, and so on. No, no; the only thing I can't trust my men about is to work as hard when I am away as when I am there. And now, Sir,

what can I do for you? Any more Bruntsea pebbles? The last were not worth the cutting.'

'So you said; but I did not think so. We have some agates as good as any from Aberystwith or Perthshire. But what I want now is to open this case. It must be done quite privately, for a most particular reason. It does open, doesn't it? I am sure it does.'

'Certainly it opens,' Mr. Handkin answered; while I trembled with anxiety, as he lightly felt it round the edges with fingers engrained with corundum. 'I could open it in one instant, but the enamel might fly. Will you risk it?'

The Major looked at me, and I said, 'Oh no, please not to risk anything, if any slower process will do it without risk. We want it done without injury.'

'Then it will cost a good bit,' he replied; 'I can open it for five shillings, if you run the risk. If that rests with me, I must charge five pounds.'

'Say three,' cried the Major. 'Well, then,

say four guineas ; I have a lot of work in store for you.'

'I never overcharge, and I never depart from my figures,' the lapidary answered. 'There is only one other man in London who knows the secret of this enamel, and he is my brother. They never make such enamel now. The art is lost, like that of the French paste of a hundred years ago, which almost puzzles even me until I go behind it. I will give you my brother's address, if you like ; but instead of five pounds, he will charge you ten guineas—if it must be done in private. Without that condition, I can do it for two pounds. You wish to know why that should make such a difference. Well, for this simple reason, to make sure of the job, it must be done by daylight. It can be done only in my chief work-room. If no one is to see what I am about (and my men have sharp eyes, I can tell you), all my hands must be sacked for the afternoon, but not without their wages. That alone would go far towards the difference ; and then there is the dropping of the jobs in hand, and waste of

power, and so on. I have asked you too little, Major Hockin, I assure you; but having said, I will stick to it. Although I would much rather you would let me off.'

'I have known you for many years,' the Major answered, 'ever since you were a boy, with a flat box, working at our Cornish opals. You would have done a lot of work for five pounds then. But I never knew you overcharge for anything. We agree to your terms, and are obliged to you. But you guarantee no damage?'

'I will open this locket, take out its contents, whatever they may be, and reclose it, so that the maker, if still alive—which is not very probable—should not know that it had been meddled with.'

'Very well, that is exactly what we want; for I have an idea about it which I may try to go on with afterwards. And for that it is essential to have no symptom that it ever has been opened. What are these brilliants worth, Mr. Handkin?'

'Well, sir, in the trade about a hundred

and fifty; though I daresay they cost three hundred. And the portrait is worth another hundred, if I find on the back the marks I expect.'

'You do not mean to say that you know the artist!' I could not help exclaiming, though determined not to speak. 'Oh then, we shall find out everything!'

'Erema, you are a—well, you are a silly!' Major Hockin exclaimed; and then coloured with remembering that rather he should have let my lapse pass. But the lapidary seemed to pay no attention, only to be calling down to some one far below. 'Now mind what you say,' the Major whispered to me, just as if he were the essence of discretion.

'The work-room is clear now,' Mr. Handkin said; 'the fellows were delighted to get their afternoon. Now you see that I have to take off this hoop, and there lies the difficulty. I could have taken out the gold back, as I said, with very little trouble, by simply cutting it. But the locket would never have been quite the same, though we put a new back; and

more than that, the pressure of the tool might flaw the enamel or even crack the portrait, for the make of this thing is peculiar. Now first I submit the rim or verge, without touching the brilliants, mind you, to the action of a little preparation of my own, a gentle but penetrative solvent. You are welcome to watch me, you will be none the wiser ; you are not in the trade, though the young lady looks as if she would make a good polisher. Very well—if this were an ordinary closure, with two flat surfaces meeting, the solvent would be absorbed into the adhesion, expansion would take place, and there we have it. But this is what we call a cyme-joint, a cohesion of two curved surfaces, formed in a reflex curve which admits the solvent most reluctantly, or indeed not at all, without too long application. For that, then, another kind of process is needful, and we find it in frictional heat applied most gradually and judiciously. For that I must have a buff-leather wheel, whose revolutions are timed to a nicety, and that wheel I only have in this room. Now you see why I sent the men away.'

Though I watched his work with great interest, it is out of my power to describe it now, and, moreover, it is not needful. Major Hockin, according to his nature, grew quite restless and impatient, and even went out for a walk with his cane unpacked and unsheathed against cabmen. But I was content to wait and watch, having always heard and thought that good work will not do itself, but must have time and skill to second it. And Mr. Handkin, moving arms, palms, and fingers beautifully, put the same thought into words.

'Good work takes a deal of time to do, but the man that does it all the time knows well that it will take long to undo. Here it comes undone at last!'

As he spoke, the excitable Major returned.

'Done it, eh? Well, you are a clever fellow. Now, don't look inside it; that is no part of your business, nor mine either, unless this young lady desires it. Hand it to her first, my friend.'

'Wait half a minute,' said the lapidary; 'it is so far opened that the hoop spins round, but

it must not be taken off until it cools. The lady may lift it then with care. I have done this job as a piece of fine art. I have no wish to see any more of it.'

'Handkin, don't you be so touchy to a brother Cornishman. I thought that I was Cornish enough. But you go cliffs beyond me.'

'Well, Major Hockin,' the lapidary answered, 'I beg your pardon if I said harm. But a man doing careful and skilled work—and skilled work it is, at every turn of the hand, as Miss can bear witness, while you walked off—he don't care who it is, Major Hockin; he would fight his own brother to maintain it.'

'Very well, very well. Let us come away. I always enter into everybody's feelings. I see yours as clearly, Handkin, as if you had laid them open on that blessed wheel. My insight has always been remarkable. Everyone, without exception, says that of me. Now come away, come away—will you never see?'

Intent as I was upon what lay in my left

palm relaxing itself, I could not help being sorry for the way in which the man of art, after all his care, was ground down by his brother Cornishman. However, he had lived long enough in the world to feel no surprise at ingratitude.

Now I went to one of the windows, as the light (which had been very good) began to pale from its long and laboured sufferance of London, and then, with soft and steady touch, I lifted off the loosened hoop. A smell of mustiness—for smells go through what nothing else can—was the first thing to perceive, and then, having moved the disc of gold, I found a piece of vellum. This was doubled, and I opened it, and read, in small clear writing—

'May 7, 1809 A.D., George, Lord Castlewood, married Winifred, only child of Thomas Hoyle, as this his signature witnesseth. 'Castlewood.

(Witness) 'Thomas Hoyle.'

There was nothing more inside this locket, except two little wisps of hair tied with gold thread, and the miniature upon ivory, bearing on the back some anagram, probably that of the artist.

Already had I passed through a great many troubles, changes, chances, and adventures which always seem strange (when I come to look back), but never surprised me at the moment. Indeed, I might almost make bold to pronounce that not many persons of my age and sex have been visited, wholly against their own will, by such a series of incidents, not to say marvellous, but, at any rate, fairly to be called unusual. And throughout them perhaps it will be acknowledged by all who have cared to consider them that up to the present time I did not fail more than themselves might have done in patience. And in no description of what came to pass have I coloured things at all in my own favour—at least, so far as intention goes—neither laid myself out to get sympathy, though it often would have done me a world of good.

But now I am free to confess that my patience broke down very sadly. Why, if what was written on that vellum were true, and Major Hockin correct as well, it came to no less than this, that my own dear father was a base-

born son, and I had no right to the name I was so proud of! If, moreover, as I now began to dream, that terrible and mysterious man did not resemble my father so closely without some good reason, it seemed too likely that he might be his elder brother, and the proper heir.

This was bad enough to think of, but an idea a thousandfold worse assailed me in the small hours of the night, as I lay on Mrs. Strouss's best bed, which she kept for consuls, or foreign barons, or others whom she loved to call 'international notorieties.' Having none of these now, she assigned me that bed after hearing all I had to say, and not making all that she might have done of it, because of the praise that would fall to Mrs. Busk.

However, she acknowledged that she knew nothing of the history of 'the poor old lord.' He might have carried on, for all she could tell, with many wives before his true one, a thing she heard too much of; but as for the Captain not being his true son, and the proper heir to the peerage, let any one see him walk twice, and then have a shadow of a doubt about it! This

logic pleased, but convinced me not; and I had to go to bed in a very unhappy, restless, and comfortless state of mind.

I hope that, rather than myself, that bed, full of international confusion, is to blame for the wicked ideas which assailed me while I could not even try to sleep. One of them—and a loyal daughter could scarcely have a worse one—was that my own dear father, knowing Lord Castlewood's bad behaviour, and his own sad plight in consequence, and through that knowledge caring little to avenge his death, for wife and children's sake preferred to foil inquiry rather than confront the truth and challenge it. He might not have meant to go so far, at first beginning with it; but starting once might be driven on by grievous loss, and bitter sense of recreant friends, and the bleak despair of a homeless world before him. And serving as the scapegoat thus, he might have received from the real culprit a pledge for concealment of the family disgrace.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A RETURN CALL.

In the morning I laboured to dismiss these thoughts, these shameful suspicions, almost as hurtful to my father's honour as was the vile criminal charge itself. And calling back my memories of him, and dwelling on what Mr. Shovelin said, and Uncle Sam and others, I became quite happy in the firm conviction that I ought to be put upon bread and water for having such black visions. Then suddenly a thing came to my mind which scattered happy penitence.

Major Hockin had spoken of another purpose which he had in store while bringing me thus to London—another object, that is to say, beside the opening of the trinket. And this his second intention was to 'have it out,' as he expressed it, 'with that league of snakes, and

scorpions, and curs, Vypan, Goad, and Terryer.' This was the partnership whose card of business had been delivered at the saw mills, under circumstances which, to say the least, required explanation. And the Major, with strong words and tugs of his head-crest, had vowed to get that explanation, or else put the gang of them into a police-dock.

Moreover, when at the opening of the locket I did not think fit to show the lapidary what I had found inside, except the painting on ivory (which proved to be as he expected), and when my companion suppressed curiosity at the risk of constitution, and while I could scarcely tell what I was about (through sudden shock and stupidity), I must have been hurried on to tell Major Hockin the whole of the private things I had discovered. For in truth there was scarcely any time to think; and I was afraid of giving way, which must have befallen me without relief of words; and being so much disturbed I may, in the cab, have rushed off for comfort to the Major sitting so close to me. No doubt I did so from what happened afterwards;

but in the morning, after such a night, I really could not be certain what I had said to Betsy, and what to him.

A large mind would have been steady throughout, and regarded the question of birth as a thing to which we, who are not consulted about it, should bear ourselves indifferently. And gladly would I have done so, if I could; but the power was not in me. No doubt it served me right for having been proud about such a trifle; but though I could call it a trifle as long as it seemed to be in my favour, my strength of mind was not enough to look at it so when against me.

Betsy told me not to be like that, for I had a great deal to go through yet, and must not be drawing on my spirit so, every atom of which would be needful. For the General—as she called the Major—was coming to fetch me at eleven o'clock to face some abominable rascals, and without any breakfast how could I do it? Then I remembered all about the appointment to go to Messrs. Vypan, and beginning to think about them I saw sad confirmation of my bad

ideas. My father's wicked elder brother, by another mother, had left his own rights pending, as long as my father lived, for good reason. For if the latter had turned against him, through a breach of compact, things might go ill in a criminal court; but having him silenced now by death, this man might come forward boldly and claim estates and title. His first point would be to make sure as sure could be of the death of my father, to get hold of his private papers, and of me, who might possess dangerous knowledge. And if this were so, one could understand at once Mr. Goad's attempt upon Uncle Sam.

'Now, none of this, none of this, I say, Erema!' Major Hockin exclaimed, as he ran in and saw me scarcely even caring to hold my own with the gentle Maximilian—to which name Mr. Strouss was promoted from the too vernacular 'Hans'—'my dear, I never saw you look ill before. Why, bless my heart, you will have crows-feet! Nurse, what are you doing with her? Look at her eyes, and be ashamed of yourself. Give her goulard, tisane,

tiffany—I never know what the proper word is—something, anything, volatile Sally, harts-horn, ammonia, aromatic vinegar, saline draught, or something strong; why I want her to look at her very, very best.'

'As if she was a-going to a ball, poor dear,' Betsy Strouss replied with some irony. 'A young lady full of high spirits by nature, and have never had her first dance yet! The laws and institutions of this kingdom is too bad for me, General. I shall turn foreigner, like my poor husband.'

'It is vere goot, vere goot always,' said the placid Maximilian; 'foreigner dis way, foreigner dat way; according to the hills, or de sea, or de fighting, or to de time born, or someting else.'

'Hold your tongue, Hans,' cried his Wilhelmina; 'remember that you are in England now, and must behave constitutionally. None of your loose outlandish ideas will ever get your bread in England. Was I born according to fighting, or hills, or sea, or anything less than the will of the Lord, that made the whole of them, and made you too? General, I beg

you to excuse him, if you can. When he gets upon such things, he never can stop. His goodness is very great; but he must have a firm hand put upon his "philosophy." Maximilian, you may go, and smoke your pipe for an hour and a quarter, and see where the cheapest greens and oil are, for His Excellence is coming in to-night; and mind you get plenty of stump in them. His Excellence loves them, and they fill the dish, besides coming cheaper. Now, Miss Erema, if you please, come here. Trust you in me, Miss, and soon I will make you a credit to the General.'

I allowed her to manage my dress and all that, according to her own ideas; but when she entreated to finish me up with the 'leastest little touch of red, scarcely up to the usual colour, by reason of not sleeping,' I stopped her at once, and she was quite content with the colour produced by the thought of it. Meanwhile Major Hockin, of course, was becoming beyond all description impatient. He had made the greatest point of my being adorned, and expected it done in two minutes! And he

hurried me so, when I did come down, that I scarcely noticed either cab or horse, and put on my new gloves anyhow.

'My dear, you look very nice,' he said at last, when thoroughly tired of grumbling; 'that scoundrel of a Goad will be quite amazed at sight of the child he went to steal.'

'Mr. Goad,' I replied, with a shudder, caused perhaps by dark remembrance; 'if we go to the office, you surely will not expect me to see Mr. Goad himself?'

'That depends, as the Frenchmen say. It is too late now to shrink back from anything. If I can spare you, I will. If not, you must not be ashamed to show yourself.'

'I am never ashamed to show myself. But I would rather not go to that place at all. If things should prove to be as I begin to think, I had better withdraw from the whole of it, and only lament that I ever began. My father was right, after all my father was wise; and I ought to have known it. And perhaps Uncle Sam knew the truth, and would not tell me, for fear of my rushing to the Yosemite. Cabman,

please to turn the horse, and go in the opposite direction.' But the Major pulled me back, and the driver lifted his elbow and said, 'All right.'

'Erema,' the Major began quite sternly, 'things are gone a little too far for this. We are now embarked upon a most important investigation'—even in my misery I could scarce help smiling at his love of big official words—'an investigation of vast importance. A crime of the blackest dye has been committed and calmly hushed up, for some petty family reason, for a period of almost twenty years. I am not blaming your father, my dear, you need not look so indignant. It is your own course of action, remember, which has led to the present—the present—well, let us say imbroglio. A man of honour and an officer of Her Majesty's service stands now committed at your request, mind at your own request——'

'Yes, yes, I know; but I only meant you to—to go as far as I should wish.'

'Confidential instructions, let us say; but there are times when duty to society overrides

fine feeling. I have felt that already. The die is cast. No half-and-half measures, no beating about the bush, for me. After what I saw yesterday, and the light that burst upon me, I did not act hastily—I never do; though slow coaches may have said so. I put this and that together carefully, and had my dinner, and made up my mind. And you see the result in that man on the box.'

'The cabman? Oh yes, you resolved to have a cab, and drive to those wicked informers.'

'Where are your eyes? You are generally so quick. This morning you are quite unlike yourself—so weak, so tearful, and timorous! Have you not seen that by side of the cabman there sits another man altogether? One of the most remarkable men of the age—as your dear Yankees say.'

'Not a policeman in disguise, I hope. I saw a very common, insignificant man. I thought he was the driver's groom, perhaps.'

'Hush! he hears everything, even on this granite. He is not a policeman; if he were, a

few things that disgrace the force never would happen. If the policemen of England did their duty as our soldiers do, at once I would have gone to them; my duty would have been to do so. As it is, I go to our private police, who would not exist if the force were worth a rap. Vypan, Goad, and Terryer, in spite of Goad's clumsiness, rank second; I go to the first of all these firms, and I get their very cleverest rascal.'

Major Hockin, speaking in this hoarse whisper—for he could not whisper gently, folded his arms, and then nodded his head, as much as to say, 'I have settled it now. You have nothing to do but praise me.' But I was vexed and perplexed too much to trust my voice with an answer.

'The beauty of this arrangement is,' he continued with vast complacency, 'that the two firms hate one another as the devil hates—no, that won't do, there is no holy water to be found amongst them—well, as a snake hates a slow-worm, let us say. "Set a thief to catch a thief," is a fine old maxim; still better, when the two thieves have robbed one another.'

As he spoke, the noble stranger slipped off the driving-seat, without troubling the cabman to stop his jerking crawl; and he did it so well that I had no chance of observing his nimble face or form. 'You are disappointed,' said the Major, which was the last thing I would have confessed; 'you may see that man ten thousand times, and never be able to swear to him. Ha, ha, he is a oner!'

'I disdain such mean tricks beyond all expression,' I exclaimed as was only natural, 'and everything connected with them. It is so low to talk of such things. But what in the world made him do it? Where does he come from, and what is his name?'

'Like all noble persons, he has got so many names that he does not know which is the right one; only his are short and theirs are long. He likes "Jack" better than anything else, because it is not distinctive. "Cosmopolitan Jack" some call him, from his combining the manners and customs, features and figures, of nearly all mankind. He gets on with every one, for every one is gratified by seeing himself reflected in

him. And he can jump from one frame to another as freely as Proteus or the populace. And yet with all that he is perfectly honest to any allegiance he undertakes. He would not betray us to Vypan, Goad, and Terryer, for your great nugget and the Castlewood estates.'

'I have heard that there are such people,' I said, 'but what can he possibly know about me? And what is he coming to do for us now?'

'He knows all about you, for a very simple reason. That you do not know him is a proof of his ability. For you must have met him, times out of number. This is the fellow employed by your good but incapable cousin, Lord Castlewood.'

'He is not incapable; he is a man of great learning, and noble character——'

'Well, never mind that—you must not be so hot. What I mean is, that he has done nothing for you, beyond providing for your safety. And that he certainly did right well, and at considerable expense, for this man can't be had for nothing. You need have been under no terror at all, in any of the scenes you have

been through. Your safety was watched for continually.'

'Then why did he not come and help me? Why did he not find out that horrible man?'

'Because it was not in his orders; and Jack is the last man to go beyond those. He is so clever that the stupid Moonites took him for a stupid Moonite. You should have employed him yourself, Erema; but you are so proud and independent.'

'I should hope so indeed. Should I put up with deceit? If the truth is not to be had without falsehood, it becomes itself a falsehood. But what is this man to do here now?'

'That depends upon circumstances. He has better orders than I could give, for I am no hand at scheming. Here we are; or here we stop. Say nothing till I tell you. Pray, allow me the honour. You keep in the back-ground, remember, with your veil, or whatever you call it, down. Nobody stops at the very door. Of course that is humbug—we conform to it.'

With a stiff inclination, the gallant Major handed me out of the cab in a quiet corner of

a narrow street, then paid the driver with less fuss than usual, and led me into a queer little place marked in almost illegible letters, 'Little England Polygon.' 'You have the card, my dear?' he whispered; 'keep it till I call you in. But be ready to produce it in a moment. For the rest, I leave you to your own wit. Jack is on the watch, mind.'

There were two doors near together, one a brave door with a plate, and swung on playing hinges, the other of too secluded a turn to even pronounce itself 'private.' We passed through the public door, and found only a lobby, with a boy on guard. 'Mr. Goad? Yes, sir. This way, sir,' cried the boy. 'Lady stay? Yes, sir, waiting-room for ladies. Chair, Miss, here, if you please, first right. Mr. Goad, second on the left. Knock twice. Paper, Miss? Poker chained at this time of year. Bell A, glass of water. Bell B, cup of tea, if ladies grows impatient.'

If I had been well, I might have reduced this boy to his proper magnitude, for I never could endure young flippancy; but my spirits

were so low that the boy banged the door, with a fine sense of having vanquished me. And before there was any temptation to ring Bell A, not to mention Bell B, the sound of a wrathful voice began coming. Nearer and nearer it came, till the Major strode into the 'ladies' waiting-room,' and used language no ladies should wait for.

'Oh, don't,' I said; 'what would Mrs. Hockin say? And consider me too, Major Hockin, if you please.'

'I have considered you, and that makes me do it. Everybody knows what I am. Did I ever exaggerate in all my life? Did I ever say anything without just grounds? Did I ever take any distorted views? Did I ever draw upon my imagination? Erema, answer me, this instant!'

'I do not remember a single instance of your drawing upon your imagination,' I answered gravely, and did not add—'because there is none to draw upon.'

'Very well. I was sure of your concurrence. Then just come with me. Take my

arm, if you please, and have the thief's card ready. Now keep your temper and your self-command.'

With this good advice, the Major, whose arm and whole body were jerking with loss of temper, led me rapidly down the long passage and through a door, and my eyes met the eyes of the very man who had tried to bribe Uncle Sam of me. He never saw me then, and he did not know me now; but his insolent eyes fell under mine. I looked at him quietly, and said nothing.

'Now, Mr. Goad, you still assert that you never were in California—never even crossed the Atlantic. This young lady under my protection—don't you be afraid, my dear—is the Honourable Erema Castlewood, whom you, in the pay of a murderer, went to fetch, and perhaps to murder. Now, do you acknowledge it? You wrote her description, and ought to know her. You double-dyed villain, out with it!'

'Major Hockin,' said Mr. Goad, trying to look altogether at his ease, but failing, and with his bull-dog forehead purple, 'if indeed you are

an officer—which I doubt for the credit of Her Majesty's service—if the lady were not present, I should knock you down.' And the big man got up as if to do it.

'Never mind her,' my companion answered in a magnanimous manner; 'she has seen worse than that, poor thing. Here I am—just come and do it.'

The Major was scarcely more than half the size of Mr. Goad, in mere bodily bulk, and yet he defied him in this way! He carefully took his blue lights off, then drew up the crest of his hair, like his wife's most warlike cock a-crowing, and laid down his rattan upon a desk, and doubled his fists and waited. Then he gave me a blink from the corner of his gables, clearly meaning 'Please to stop and see it out.' It was a distressing thing to see, and the Major's courage was so grand that I could not help smiling. Mr. Goad, however, did not advance, but assumed a superior manner.

'Major,' he said, 'we are not young men; we must not be so hasty. You carry things with too high a hand, as veteran officers are apt

to do. Sir, I make allowance for you; I retract my menace, and apologise. We move in different spheres of life, sir; or I would offer you my hand.'

'No, thank you!' the Major exclaimed, and then looked sorry for his arrogance. 'When a man has threatened me, and that man sees the mistake of doing so, I am pacified, sir, in a moment; but it takes me some time to get over it. I have served His Gracious Majesty, and now Hers, in every quarter of the civilised globe, with distinction, sir, with distinction, and thanks, and no profit to taint the transaction, sir. In many battles I have been menaced with personal violence, and have received it, as in such positions is equitable. I am capable, sir, of receiving it still, and repaying it, not without interest.'

'Hang it, Major, if a man is sorry, a soldier forgives him frankly. You abused me, and I rashly threatened you. I beg your pardon, as a man should do, and that should be an end to it.'

'Very well, very well; say no more about

it. But am I to understand that you still deny in that barefaced manner, with my witness here, the fact of your having been at Colonel Gundry's —my cousin, sir, and a man not to be denied, without an insult to myself—a man who possesses ingots of gold, ingots of gold, enough to break the Bank of England, and a man whose integrity doubles them all. Have you not heard of the monster nugget, transcending the whole of creation, discovered by this young lady looking at you, in the bed of the Sawmill River, and valued at more than half a million?'

'You don't mean to say so? When was it? Sylvester never said a word about it. The papers, I mean, never mentioned it.'

'Try no more—well, I won't say lies, though they are confounded lies—what I mean is no further evasion, Mr. Goad. Sylvester's name is enough, sir. Here is the card of your firm, with your own note of delivery on the back, handed by you to my cousin, the Colonel. And here stands the lady who saw you do it.'

'Major, I will do my very best to remember. I am here, there, everywhere—China one

day, Peru the next, Siberia the day after. And this young lady found the nugget, did she? How wonderfully lucky she must be!'

'I am lucky; I find out everything; and I shall find out you, Mr. Goad.' Thus I spoke on the spur of the moment, and I could not have spoken better after a month of consultation. Rogues are generally superstitious. Mr. Goad glanced at me with a shudder, as I had gazed at him some three years back; and then he dropped his bad, oily-looking eyes.

'I make mistakes sometimes,' he said, 'as to where I have been, and where I have not. If this young lady saw me there, it stands to reason that I may have been there. I have a brother extremely similar. He goes about a good deal also. Probably you saw my brother.'

'I saw no brother of yours, but yourself. Yourself—your mean and cowardly self—and I shall bring you to justice.'

'Well, well,' he replied, with a poor attempt to turn the matter lightly; 'I never contradict ladies; it is an honour to be so observed by them. Now, Major, can you give me any good

reason for drawing upon a bad memory? My time is valuable. I cannot refer to such bygone matters for nothing.'

'We will not bribe you, if that is what you mean,' Major Hockin made answer scornfully. 'This is a criminal case, and we have evidence you little dream of. Our only offer is—your own safety, if you make a clean breast of it. We are on the track of a murderer, and your connection with him will ruin you. Unless you wish to stand in the dock at his side, you will tell us everything.'

'Sir, this is violent language.'

'And violent acts will follow it; if you do not give up your principal, and every word you know about him, you will leave this room in custody. I have Cosmopolitan Jack outside, and the police at a sign from him will come.'

'Is this job already in the hands of the police, then?'

'No, not yet. I resolved to try you first. If you refuse, it will be taken up at once; and away goes your last chance, sir.'

Mr. Goad's large face became like a field of

conflicting passions and low calculations. Terror, fury, cupidity, and doggedness never had a larger battle-field.

'Allow me at least to consult my partners,' he said in a low voice, and almost with a whine; 'we may do things irregular sometimes, but we never betray a client.'

'Either betray your client or yourself!' the Major answered with a downright stamp. 'You shall consult no one. You have by this watch forty-five seconds to consider it.'

'You need not trouble yourself to time me,' the other answered sulkily; 'my duty to the firm overrides private feeling. Miss Castlewood, I call you to witness, since Major Hockin is so peppery—'

'Peppery, sir, is the very last word that ever could be applied to me. My wife, my friends, every one that knows me, even my furthest-off correspondents, agree that I am pure patience.'

'It may be so, Major; but you have not shown it. Miss Castlewood, I have done you no harm. If you had been given up to me,

you would have been safer than where you were. My honour would have been enlisted. I now learn things which I never dreamed of—or, at least—at least, only lately. I always believed thecriminality to be on the other side. We never ally ourselves with wrong. But lately things have come to my knowledge which made me doubtful as to facts. I may have been duped—I believe I have been—I am justified, therefore, in turning the tables.'

'If you turn tables,' broke in the Major, who was grumbling to himself at the very idea of having any pepper in his nature; 'Goad, if you turn tables, mind you, you must do it better than the mesmerists. Out of this room you do not stir; no darkness—no bamboozling! Show your papers, sir, without sleight-of-hand. Surrender, or you get no quarter.'

To me it was quite terrifying to see my comrade thus push his victory. Mr. Goad could have killed him at any moment, and but for me perhaps would have done so. But even in his fury he kept on casting glances of superstitious awe at me, while I stood quite still and

gazed at him. Then he crossed the room to a great case of drawers, unlocked something above the Major's head, made a sullen bow, and handed him a packet.

CHAPTER XLIX.

WANTED, a SAWYER.

To judge Mr. Goad by his own scale of morality and honour, he certainly had behaved very well through a trying and unexpected scene. He fought for his honour a great deal harder than ever it could have deserved of him; and then he strove well to appease it with cash, the mere thought of which must have flattered it. However, it was none the worse for a little disaster of this kind. At the call of duty it coalesced with interest and fine sense of law, and the contact of these must have strengthened it to face any future production.

For a moment he laid it aside in a drawer —and the smallest he possessed would hold it— and being compelled to explain his instructions (partly in shorthand and partly in cypher), he

kindly, and for the main of it truly, interpreted them as follows :—

'*July* 31, 1858.—Received directions from M. H. to attend without fail, at whatever expense, to any matter laid before us by a tall, dark gentleman bearing his card. M. H. considerably in our debt; but his father cannot last long. Understand what he means, having dealt with this matter before, and managed well with it.

'*August* 2.—Said gentleman called, gave no name, and was very close. Had experienced some great wrong. Said that he was true heir to the C. estates now held by Lord C. Only required a little further evidence to claim them; and some of this was to be got through us. Important papers must be among the effects of the old lord's son, lately dead in California, the same for whom a reward had been offered, and we had been employed about it. Must get possession of those papers, and of the girl, if possible. Yankees to be bribed, at whatever figure, and always stand out for a high one. Asked where funds were to come from; gave

good reference and verified it. To be debited to the account of M. H. Said we would have nothing to do with it, without more knowledge of our principal. Replied, with anger, that he himself was Lord C., ousted by usurpers. Had not the necessary proofs as yet, but would get them, and blast all his enemies. Had serious doubts about his sanity, still more serious about his solvency. Resolved to inquire into both points.

'*August* 3.—M. H. himself as cool as ever, but shammed to be indignant. Said we were fools if we did not take it up. Not a farthing would he pay of his old account, and fellows like us could not bring actions. Also a hatful of money was to be made of this job, managed snugly. Emigrants to California were the easiest of all things to square up. A whole train of them disappeared this very year, by Indians or Mormons, and no bones made. The best and most active of us must go—too ticklish for an agent. We must carry on all above board out there, and as if sent by British Government. In the far West, no one any wiser. Resolved to go myself, upon having a certain sum in ready.

August 5.—The money raised. Start for Liverpool to-morrow. Require a change, or would not go. May hit upon a nugget, &c., &c.'

Mr. Goad's memoranda of his adventures, and signal defeat by Uncle Sam, have no claim to be copied here, though differing much from my account. With their terse unfeeling strain, they might make people laugh who had not sadder things to think of. And it matters very little how that spy escaped, as such people almost always seem to do.

'Two questions, Goad, if you please,' said Major Hockin, who had smiled sometimes, through some of his own remembrances: 'what has happened since your return? and what is the name of the gentleman whom you have called "M. H."?'

'Is it possible that you do not know, sir? Why he told us quite lately that you were at his back! You must know Sir Montague Hockin.'

'Yes, yes, certainly I do,' the old man said shortly, with a quick gleam in his eyes; 'a highly respected gentleman now, though he

may have sown his wild oats like the rest. To be sure; of course I know all about it. His meaning was good, but he was misled.'

In all my little experience of life nothing yet astonished me more than this. I scarcely knew whom to believe, or what. That the Major, most upright of men, should take up his cousin's roguery—all new to him—and speak of him thus! But he gave me a nudge; and being all confusion, I said nothing, and tried to look at neither of them; because my eyes must always tell the truth.

'As to the other point,' Mr. Goad went on; 'since my embassy failed, we have not been trusted with the confidence we had a right to expect. Ours is a peculiar business, sir; "Trust me in all or trust me not at all," as one of our modern poets says, is the very essence of it. And possibly, Major, if that had been done, even your vigour and our sense of law might not have extorted from me what you have heard. Being cashiered, as we are, we act according to the strictest honour in divulging things no longer confided to us.

'Goad, you have done yourself the utmost credit, legally, intellectually, and—well, I will not quite say morally. If I ever have a nasty job to do—at least I mean a stealthy one—which God, who has ever kept me straight, forbid!—I will take care not to lose your address. I have a very queer thing occurring on my manor—I believe it is bound up with this affair—never mind; I must think—I hate all underhanded work.'

'Major, our charges are strictly moderate. We do in a week what takes lawyers a twelvemonth. Allow me to hand you one of our new cards.'

'No, no. My pockets are all full. And I don't want to have it found among my papers. No offence, Mr. Goad, no offence at all. Society is not as it was when I was young. I condemn no modern institutions, sir; though the world gets worse every day of its life.'

In terror of committing himself to any connection with such a firm, the Major put on his dark lights again, took up his cane, and let everybody know, with a summary rap on the

floor, that he might have relaxed, but would not allow any further liberty about it. And as he marched away, not proudly, yet with a very nice firmness, I was almost afraid to say anything to him, to disturb his high mental attitude. For Mrs. Hockin must have exclaimed that here was a noble spectacle.

'But one thing,' I forced myself to suggest; 'do ask one thing before we go. That strange man who called himself "Lord Castlewood" here, and "Captain Brown" at Soberton—have they any idea where to find him now? And why does he not come forward?'

My comrade turned back, and put these questions; and the private inquirer answered that they had no idea of his whereabouts, but could easily imagine many good reasons for his present reserve of claim. For instance, he might be waiting for discovery of further evidence, or (which was even more likely) for the death of the present Lord Castlewood, which could not be very far distant, and would remove the chief opponent. It grieved me deeply to find that my cousin's condition was so noto-

rious, and treated of in such a cold-blooded way, like a mule fallen lame or a Chinaman in Frisco.

'My dear, you must grow used to such things,' Major Hockin declared, when he saw that I was vexed, after leaving those selfish premises; 'if it were not for death, how could anybody live? Right feeling is shown by considering such points, and making for the demise of others even more preparation than for our own. Otherwise there is a selfishness about it by no means Christian-minded. You look at things always from such an intense and even irreligious point of view. But such things are out of my line altogether. Your Aunt Mary understands them best.'

'Would you be able,' I said, 'to account to Aunt Mary conscientiously for that dreadful story which I heard you tell? I scarcely knew where I stood, Major Hockin.'

'You mean about Montague? Family honour must be defended at any price. Child, I was greatly pained to go beyond the truth; but in such a case it is imperative. I was

shocked and amazed at my cousin's conduct; but how could I let such a fellow know that? And think what I owe to his father, Sir Rufus! No, no; there are times when Bayard himself must stretch a point. Honour and religion alike demand it; and Mrs. Hockin need never hear of it.'

'Certainly, I shall not speak of it,' I answered, though a little surprised at his arguments; 'but you mean, of course, to find out all about it. It seems to me such a suspicious thing. But I never could bear Sir Montague.'

The Major smiled grimly, and, perceiving that he wished to drop the subject, I said no more. He had many engagements in London always, and I must not attempt to engross his time. However, he would not for a moment hear of leaving me anywhere but with Betsy, for perhaps he saw how strange I was. And, being alone at last with her, I could keep up my pride no longer.

Through all that had happened there never had been such a dreadful trial as I had borne this day without a word to any one. Danger,

and loss, and sad dreariness of mind, from want of young companionship; mystery also, and obscurity of life, had always been my fortune. With all of these I had striven, to the best of my very small ability, having from nature no gift except the dull one of persistence. And throughout that struggle I had felt quite sure that a noble yearning for justice and a lofty power of devotion were my two impelling principles. But now, when I saw myself sprung of low birth, and the father of my worship base-born, down fell all my arduous castles, and I craved to go under the earth and die.

For every word of Mr. Goad, and every crooked turn of little things in twist against me —even the Major's last grim smile—all began to work together, and make up a wretched tumult, sounding in my ears like drums. Where was the use of going on, of proving anybody's guilt, or anybody's innocence, if the utmost issue of the whole would be to show my father an impostor? Then, and only then, I knew that love of abstract justice is to little minds impossible, that sense of honour is too prone to

hang on chance of birth, and virtue's fountain, self-respect, springs but turbidly from soiled soil.

When I could no longer keep such bitter imaginings to myself, but poured them forth to Betsy, she merely laughed, and asked me how I could be such a simpleton. Only to think of my father in such a light was beyond her patience! Where was my pride, she would like to know, and my birth, and my family manners? However, she did believe there was something in my ideas, if you turned them inside out, and took hold of them by the other end. It was much more likely, to her mind, that the villain, the unknown villain at the bottom of all the misery, was really the son born out of wedlock, if any such there were at all; and therefore a wild, harum-scarum fellow, like Ishmael in the Book of Genesis. And it would be just of a piece, she thought, with the old lord's character to drive such a man to desperation by refusing to give him a farthing.

'All that might very well be,' I answered; 'but it would in no way serve to explain my

father's conduct, which was the great mystery of all.' Nevertheless, I was glad to accept almost any view of the case rather than that which had forced itself upon me since the opening of the locket. Any doubt of that most wretched conclusion was a great relief while it lasted; and, after so long a time of hope and self-reliance, should I cast away all courage through a mere suspicion?

While I was thus re-assuring myself, and being re-assured by my faithful nurse, sad news arrived, and drove my thoughts into another crooked channel. Mrs. Hockin, to meet my anxiety for some tidings from California, had promised that, if any letter came, she would not even wait for the post, but forward it by special messenger. And thus, that very same evening, I received a grimy epistle, in an unknown hand, with the post-mark of Sacramento. Tearing it open, I read as follows:—

'Miss Rema,—No good luck ever came, since you, to this Blue River Station, only to be washed away, and robbed by greasers, and shot through the ribs, and got more work than can do, and

find an almighty nugget sent by Satan. And now the very worst luck of all have come, wholly and out of all denial, by you, and your faces and graces, and French goings on. Not that I do not like you, mind; for you always was very polite to me, and done your best when you found me trying to put up with the trials put on me. But now this trial is the worst of all that ever came to my establishings; and to go away now as I used to think of doing when tyrannised upon is out of my way altogether, and only an action fit for a half-breed. Sawyer Gundry hath cut and run, without a word behind him—no instructions for orders in hand and pouring in—no directions where to find him—not even "God bless you" to any one of the many hands that looked up to him. Only a packet of dollars for me to pay the wages for two months to come, and a power of lawyer to receive all debts, and go on anyhow just the same. And to go on just the same is more than the worst of us has the heart for, without the sight of his old red face. He may have been pretty sharp, and too much the master

now and then, perhaps; but to do without him is a darned sight worse; and the hands don't take to me like him. Many's the time I've seen his faults, of having his own way, and such likes, and paying a man beyond his time, if his wife was out of order. And many's the time I have said myself I was fitter to be at the head of it.

'About that I was right enough, perhaps, if I had started upon my own hook; but to stand in the tracks he has worn to his own foot is to go into crooked compasses. There is never a day without some hand threatening to strike and to better himself, as if they were hogs, to come and go according to the acorns; and such low words I can never put up with, and packs them off immediate. No place can be carried on if the master is to shut up his lips to impudence. And now I have only got three hands left, with work enough for thirty, and them three only stopped on, I do believe, to grumble of me if the Sawyer do come home!

'But what we all want to know—and old

Suan took a black stick to make marks for you —is why the old man hath run away, and where. Young Firm, who was getting a sight too uppish for me to have long put up with him, he was going about here, there, and everywhere, from the very first time of your going away, opening his mouth a deal too much, and asking low questions how long I stopped to dinner. Old Suan said he was troubled in his mind, as the palefaces do be about young girls, instead of dragging them to their wigwams; and she would give him a spell to get over it. But nothing came of that; and when the war broke out, he had words with his grandfather, and went off, so they said, to join the rebels.

'Sawyer let him go, as proud as could be, though he would sooner have cut his own head off; and the very same night he sat down by his fire, and shammed to eat supper as usual. But I happened to go in to get some orders, and, my heart! I would never wish to see such things again.

'The old man would never waste a bit of victuals, as you know, Miss Rema; and being

acquaint with Suan's way of watching, he had slipped all his supper aside from his plate, and put it on a clean pocket-handkerchief, to lock it in the press till his appetite should serve; and I caught him in the act, and it vexed him. "Ha'n't you the manners to knock at the door?" he said; and I said, "Certainly," and went back and done it; and, troubled as he was, he grinned a bit. Then he bowed his great head, as he always did when he knew he had gone perhaps a trifle too far with a man in my position. I nodded to forgive him, and he stood across, and saw that he could do no less than liquor me, after such behaviour. But he only brought out one glass; and I said "Come, Colonel, square is square, you know." "Excuse of me, Martin," he said; "but no drop of strong drink passes the brim of my mouth till this gallivanting is done with. I might take too much, as the old men do, to sink what they don't want to think on." "You mean about bullycock Firm," says I; "rebel Firm—nigger-driver Firm." "Hush!" he said; "no bad words about it. He has gone by his conscience

and his heart. What do we know of what come inside of him?"

'This was true enough, for I never did make that boy out to my liking: and the old man now was as stiff as a rock, and pretty nigh as peculiar. He made me a cocktail of his own patent, to show how firm his hand was; but the lines of his face was like wainscot mouldings, and the cords of his arm stood out like cogs. Then he took his long pipe, as he may have done perhaps every blessed night for the last fifty years; but that length of time ought to have learned him better than to go for to fill it upside down. "Ha, ha!" he said, "everything is upside down, since I was a man, under heaven—countries, and nations, and kindreds, and duties; and why not an old tobacco-pipe? That's the way babies blow bubbles with them. We shall all have to smoke 'em that way, if our noble Republic is busted up. Fill yours, and try it, Martin."

'Instead of enjoying my cocktail, Miss Rema, I never was so down at mouth; for, to my mind, his old heart was broken, while he

carried on so. And let everybody say what they will, one thing there is no denying of. Never was seen, on this side the big hills, a man fit to walk in the tracks of Uncle Sam, so large and good-hearted according to his lights, hard as a grisly bear for a man to milk him, but soft in the breast-bone as a young prairie hen for all folk down upon their ninepins.

'You may be surprised, miss, to find me write so long. Fact is, the things won't go out of my mind without it. And it gives me a comfort, after all I may have said, to put good opinions upon paper. If he never should turn up again, my language will be to his credit; whereas if he do come back, with the betting a horse to a duck against it, to his pride he will read this testimonial of yours faithfully,

'Martin Clogfast.

'P.S.—Can't carry on like this much longer. Enough to rip one's heart up. You never would know the old place, miss. The heads of the horses is as long as their tails with the way they carry them; the moss is as big as a Spaniard's

beard upon the kitchen door-sill; and the old dog howls all day and night like fifty thousand scalpers. Suan saith, if you was to come back, the lad might run home after you. 'Tisn't the lad I cares about so much, but poor old Sawyer, at his time of life, swallowed up in the wilderness.'

CHAPTER L.

THE PANACEA.

As if my own trouble were not enough, so deeply was I grieved by this sad news that I had a great mind to turn back on my own and fly to far-off disasters. To do so appeared for the moment a noble thing, and almost a duty; but now, looking back, I perceive that my instinct was right when it told me to stay where I was, and see out my own sad story first. And Betsy grew hot at the mere idea of my hankering after a miller's affairs, as she very rudely expressed it. To hear about lords and ladies, and their crimes and adventures, was lovely; but to dwell upon people of common birth, and in trade, was most unbeseeming. A man who mended his own mill, and had hands like horn—well, even she was of better blood than that, she hoped.

Before these large and liberal views had fairly been expounded, Major Hockin arrived, with his mind in such a state that he opened his watch every second.

'Erema, I must speak to you alone,' he cried; 'no, not even you, Mrs. Strouss, if you please. If my ward likes to tell you—why, of course she can; but nobody shall say that I did. There are things that belong to the family alone. The most loyal retainers—you know what I mean.'

'General, I was not aware that you belonged to the family. But this way, sir; this way, if you please. There is lath and plaster to that wall, and a crack in the panel of the door, sir. But here is a room where I keep my jams, with double brick, and patent locks, from sweet-toothed lodgers. The scutcheon goes over the key-hole, General. Perhaps you will see to that, while I roll up the carpet outside; and then, if any retainers come, you will hear their footsteps.'

'Bless the woman, what a temper she has!' whispered the Major, in dread of her ears; 'is she gone, Erema? She wants discipline.'

'Yes, she is gone,' I said, trying to be lightsome; 'but you are enough to frighten anyone.'

'So far from that, she has quite frightened me. But never mind such trifles. Erema, since I saw you I have discovered, I may almost say, everything.'

Coming upon me so suddenly, even with all allowance made for the Major's sanguine opinion of his own deeds, this had such effect upon my flurried brain that practice alone enabled me to stand upright and gaze at him.

'Perhaps you imagined when you placed the matter in my hands, Miss Castlewood,' he went on, with sharp twinkles from the gables of his eyes, but soft caresses to his whiskers, 'that you would be left in the hands of a man who encouraged a crop of hay under his feet. Never did you or anybody make a greater mistake. That is not my character, Miss Castlewood.'

'Why do you call me "Miss Castlewood" so? You quite make me doubt my own right to the name.'

Major Hockin looked at me with surprise, which gladdened even more than it shamed me. Clearly his knowledge of all, as he described it, did not comprise the disgrace which I feared.

'You are almost like Mrs. Strouss to-day,' he answered with some compassion. 'What way is the wind? I have often observed that when one female shows asperity, nearly all the others do the same. The weather affects them more than men, because they know nothing about it. But to come back—are you prepared to hear what I have got to tell you?'

I bowed without saying another word; for he should be almost the last of mankind to give a lecture upon irritation.

'Very well; you wish me to go on. Perceiving how sadly you were upset by the result of those interviews, first with Handkin, and then with Goad, after leaving you here I drove at once to the office, studio, place of business, or whatever you please to call it, of the famous fellow in the portrait line, whose anagram, private mark, or whatever it is, was burnt into the back of the ivory. Handkin told me the

fellow was dead, or of course his work would be worth nothing; but the name was carried on, and the register kept, at a little place somewhere in Soho, where, on the strength of his old repute, they keep up a small trade with inferior hands. I gave them a handsome order for a thing that will never be handsome, I fear—my old battered physiognomy. And then I produced the locket which in some queer state of mind you had given me, and made them hunt out their old books, and at last discovered the very entry. But to verify it I must go to Paris, where his son is living.'

'Whose son? Lord Castlewood's?'

'Erema, have you taken leave of your senses? What son has Lord Castlewood? The artist's son, to be sure; the son of the man who did the likeness. Is it the vellum and the stuff upon it that has so upset your mind? I am glad that you showed it to me, because it would have been mean to do otherwise? But show it to no one else, my dear, except your cousin, Lord Castlewood. He has the first right of all to know it, though he will laugh at it as

I do. Trumpery of that sort! Let them produce a certified copy of a register. If they could do that, need they ever have shot that raffish old lord—I beg pardon, my dear—your highly-respected grandfather? No, no; don't tell me. Nicholas Hockin was never in any way famous for want of brains, my dear, and he tells you to keep your pluck up.'

'I never can thank you enough,' I replied, 'for such inspiriting counsel. I have been rather miserable all this day. And I have had such a letter from America.'

Without my intending any offer of the kind, or having such idea at the furthest tip of any radius of mind, I found myself under a weight about the waist, like the things the young girls put on now. And this was the arm of the Major, which had been knocked about in some actions, but was useful still to let other people know, both in this way and that, what he thought of them. And now it let me know that he pitied me.

This kindness from so old a soldier made me partial to him. He had taken an age to

understand me, because my father was out of the army almost before I was born, and therefore I had no traditions. Also, from want of drilling, I had been awkward to this officer, and sometimes mutinous, and sometimes a coward. All that, however, he forgave me when he saw me so down-hearted; and while I was striving to repress all signs, the quivering of my lips perhaps suggested thoughts of kissing. Whereupon he kissed my forehead with nice dry lips, and told me not to be at all afraid.

'How many times have you been brave?' he inquired, to set me counting, knowing from all his own children, perhaps, that nothing stops futile tears and the waste of sobs like prompt arithmetic. 'Six, if not seven times you have displayed considerable valour. Are you going to fall away through some wretched imagination of your own? Now, don't stop to argue—time will not allow it. I have put Cosmopolitan Jack as well upon the track of Captain Brown. I have not told you half of what I could tell, and what I am doing; but never mind, never mind; it is better that you

should not know too much, my dear. Young minds, from their want of knowledge of the world, are inclined to become uneasy. Now go to bed and sleep soundly, Erema, for we have lots to do to-morrow, and you have had a most worrying day to-day. To-morrow, of course, you must come with me to Paris. You can parleyvoo better than I can.'

However, as it happened, I did nothing of the kind, for when he came back in the morning, and while he was fidgeting and hurrying me, and vowing that we should lose the tidal train, a letter from Bruntsea was put into my hand. I saw Mrs. Price's clear writing followed by good Aunt Mary's crooked lines, and knew that the latter must have received it too late to be sent by her messenger. In few words it told me that, if I wished to see my cousin alive, the only chance was to start immediately.

Shock, and self-reproach, and wonder came (as usual) before grief; which always means to stay, and waits to get its mourning ready. I loved and respected my cousin more deeply than any one living, save Uncle Sam; and now

to lose them both at once seemed much too dreadful to be true. There was no time to think. I took the Major's cab, and hurried off to Paddington, leaving him to catch his tidal train.

Alas! when I got to Castlewood there was but a house of mourning. Faithful Stixon's eyes were dim, and he pointed upward, and said, 'Hush!' I entered with great awe, and asked, 'How long?' And he said, 'Four-and-twenty hours now; and a more peacefuller end was never seen, and to lament was sinful; but he was blest if he could help it.' I told him, through my tears, that this was greatly to his credit, and he must not crush fine feelings, which are an honour to our nature. And he said that I was mistress now, and must order him to my liking.

I asked him to send Mrs. Price to me, if she was not too busy; and he answered that he believed her to be a very good soul, and handy. And if he ever had been thought to speak in a sense disparishing of her, such things should not be borne in mind, with great afflictions

over us. Mrs. Price, hearing that I was come, already was on her way to me, and now glanced at the door for Mr. Stixon to depart, in a manner past misunderstanding.

'He gives himself such airs!' she said; 'sometimes one would think—but I will not trouble you now with that, Miss Castlewood, or Lady Castlewood—which do you please to be called, miss? They say that the barony goes on, when there is no more Viscount.'

'I please to be called "Miss Castlewood," even if I have any right to be called that. But don't let us talk of such trifles now. I wish to hear only of my cousin.'

'Well, you know, ma'am, what a sufferer he has been for years. If ever an angel had pains all over, and one leg compulsory of a walking-stick, that angel was his late lordship. He would stand up, and look at one, and give orders in that beautiful silvery voice of his, just as if he was lying on a bed of down. And never a twitch, nor a hitch in his face, nor his words, nor any other part of him. I assure you, miss, that I have been quite amazed and over-

whelmed with interest, while looking at his poor legs, and thinking—'

'I can quite enter into it. I have felt the same. But please to come to what has happened lately.'

'The very thing I was at the point of doing. Then last Sunday, God alone knows why, the pain did not come on at all. For the first time for seven years or more, the pain forgot the timepiece. His lordship thought that the clock was wrong; but waited with his usual patience, though missing it from the length of custom, instead of being happy. But when it was come to an hour too late for the proper attack of the enemy, his lordship sent orders for Stixon's boy to take a good horse and ride to Pangbourne for a highly respectable lawyer. There was no time to fetch Mr. Spines, you see, miss, the proper solicitor, who lives in London. The gentleman from Pangbourne was here by eight o'clock; and then and there his lordship made his will, to supersede all other wills. He put it more clearly, the lawyer said, than he himself could have put it, but not, of course, in such legal

words, but doubtless far more beautiful. Nobody in the house was forgotten; and the rule of law being, it seems, that those with best cause to remember must not witness, two of the tenants were sent for, and wrote down their names legitimate. And then his lordship lay back, and smiled, and said, 'No more pain for me ever any more.'

'All that night and three days more he slept as sound as a little child, to make up for so many years. We called two doctors in; but they only whispered and looked dismal, and told us to have hot water ready at any hour of the day or night. Nobody loved him as I did, miss, from seeing so much of his troubles, and miraculous way of bearing them; and I sat by the hour and hour, and watched him, trusting no paid nurses.

'It must have been eight o'clock on Wednesday morning—what is to-day? Oh, Friday—then Thursday morning it must have been, when the clouds opened up in the east, and the light of the sun was on the window-sill, not glaring or staring, but playing about, with patterns of

leaves between it; and I went to screen it from his poor white face; but he opened his eyes, as if he had been half-awake, half-dreaming, and he tried to lift one of his thin, thin hands to tell me not to do it. So I let the curtain stay as it was, and crept back, and asked very softly, "Will your lordship have some breakfast?"

'He did not seem to comprehend me, but only watched the window; and if ever a blessed face there was, looking towards heaven's glory, his lordship had it, so that I could scarcely keep from sobbing. For I never had seen any living body die, but knew that it must be so. He heard me catching my breath, perhaps, or at any rate he looked at me; and the poor angel knew that I was a woman; and being full of high respect, as he always was for females—in spite of the way they had served him—it became apparent to his mind that the pearl button of his neck was open, as ordered by the doctors. And he tried to lift his hand to do it, and then he tried to turn away, but could not manage either. Poor dear! the only movement he could make was to a better world.

'Then I drew the sheet across his chest, and he gave me a little smile of thanks, and perhaps he knew whose hand it was. But the look of his kind soft eyes was flickering—not steady, I mean, miss—but glancing, and stopping, and going astray, as drops of rain do on the window-glass. But I could not endure to examine him much; at such a holy time I felt that to watch death was unholy.

'Perhaps I ought to have rung the bell for others to have been present. But his lordship was always shy, you know, miss; and with none of his kindred left, and no wife to say "good-bye" to him, right or wrong I resolved alone to see him depart to his everlasting rest. And people may talk about hirelings, but I think nobody loved him as I did.'

Here Mrs. Price broke fairly down; and I could not help admiring her. To a faithful servant's humility and duty she had added a woman's pure attachment to one more gifted than herself, and ruined for life by her own sex. But she fell away frightened and ashamed beneath my look, as if I had caught her in sacrilege.

'Well, miss, we all must come and go,' she began again, rather clumsily; 'and, good and great as he was, his lordship has left few to mourn for him. Only the birds, and beasts, and animals, that he was so good to; they will miss him, if men don't. There came one of his favourite pigeons, white as snow all over, and sat on the sill of the window, and cooed, and arched up its neck for his fingers. And he tried to put his fingers out, but they were ice already. Whether that or something else brought home his thoughts, who knows, miss? but he seemed to mix the pigeon up with some of his own messages.

'"Say that I have forgiven her, if ever she did harm to me," he whispered, without moving lips. "Times and times, when I was young, I was not always steady;" and then he seemed to wander in his mind among old places; and he would have laughed at something, if his voice had been sufficient.

'"Bitter grief and pain shall never come again," he seemed to breathe, with a calm, soft smile, like a child with its rhyme about the rain

when the sun breaks out; and sure enough the sun upon the quilt above his heart was shining, as if there could be no more clouds. Then he whispered a few short words to the Lord, more in the way of thanks than prayer, and his eyes seemed to close of their own accord, or with some good spirit soothing them. And when or how his sleep passed from this world into the other there was scarcely the flutter of a nerve to show. There he lies, like an image of happiness; will you come and see him?'

I followed her to the bedroom, and am very glad that I did so; for it showed the bliss of a good man's rest, and took away my fear of death.

CHAPTER LI.

LIFE SINISTER.

When business and the little cares of earthly life awoke again, everyone told me (to my great surprise and no small terror at first, but soon to just acquiescence) that I was now the mistress of the fair estates of Castlewood, and, the male line being extinct, might claim the barony, if so pleased me; for that, upon default of male heirs, devolved upon the spindle. And as to the property, with or without any will of the late Lord Castlewood, the greater part would descend to me under unbarred settlement, which he was not known to have meddled with. On the contrary, he confirmed by his last will the settlement—which they told me was quite needless—and left me all that he had to leave; except about a thousand pounds distributed in legacies. A private letter to me was sealed up

with his will, which of course it would not behove me to make public. But thus much—since our family history is, alas! so notorious—in duty to him I should declare. He begged me, if his poor lost wife—of whom he had never spoken to me—should reappear and need it, to pay her a certain yearly sum; which I thought a great deal too much for her, but resolved to obey him exactly.

Neither the will nor the letter contained any reference to my grandfather, or the possibility of an adverse claim. I could not, however, be quit of deep uneasiness and anxiety, but staunchly determined that every acre should vanish in folds of 'the long robe,' rather than pass to a crafty villain who had robbed me of all my kindred. My hatred of that man deepened vastly as he became less abstract; while my terror decreased in proportion. I began to think that, instead of being the reckless fiend I had taken him for, he was only a low, plotting, cold-blooded rogue, without even courage to save him. By this time he must have heard all about me, my pursuit of him, and my presence

here—then why not come and shoot me, just as he shot my grandfather?

The idea of this was unwelcome; still I felt no sort of gratitude, but rather a lofty contempt towards him, for not having spirit to try it. In Shoxford churchyard he had expressed (if Sexton Rigg was not then deceived) an unholy wish to have me there, at the feet of my brothers and sisters. Also he had tried to get hold of me—doubtless with a view to my quietude—when I was too young to defend myself, and left at haphazard in a lawless land. What was the reason, if his mind was still the same, for ceasing to follow me now? Was I to be treated with contempt as one who had tried her best and could do nothing; as a feeble creature whose movements were not even worth inquiry? Anger at such an idea began to supersede fear, as my spirits returned.

Meanwhile Major Hockin was making no sign as to what had befallen him in Paris, or what Cosmopolitan Jack was about. But, strangely enough, he had sent me a letter from Bruntsea instead of Paris, and addressed in

grand style to no less a person than 'The Right Honourable Baroness Castlewood'—a title which I had resolved, for the present, neither to claim nor acknowledge. In that letter the Major mingled a pennyweight of condolence with more congratulation than the post could carry for the largest stamp yet invented. His habit of mind was to magnify things; and he magnified my small grandeur, and seemed to think nothing else worthy of mention.

Through love of the good kind cousin I had lost, even more than through common and comely respect towards the late head of the family, I felt it impossible to proceed, for the present, with any inquiries, but left the next move to the other side. And the other side made it, in a manner such as I never even dreamed of.

About three weeks after I became, in that sad way, the mistress, escaping one day from lawyers and agents, who held me in dreary interview, with long computations of this and of that, and formalities almost endless, I went, for a breath of good, earnest, fresh air, beyond pre-

cinct of garden or shrubbery. To me these seemed in mild weather to temper and humanise the wind too strictly, and take the wild spirit out of it; and now, for the turn of the moment, no wind could be too rough to tumble in. After long months of hard trouble, and worry, and fear, and sad shame, and deep sorrow, the natural spring of clear youth into air and freedom set me upward. For the nonce, there was nothing upon my selfish self to keep it downward; troubles were bubbles, and grief a low thief, and reason almost treason. I drank the fine fountain of air unsullied, and the golden light stamped with the royalty of sun.

Hilarious moments are but short, and soon cold sense comes back again. Already I began to feel ashamed of young life's selfish outburst, and the vehement spring of mere bodily health. On this account I sat down sadly in a little cove of hill, whereto the soft breeze from the river came up, with a tone of wavelets and a sprightly water-gleam. And here, in fern, and yellow grass, and tufted bights of bottom-growth, the

wind made entry for the sun, and they played with one another.

Resting here, and thinking, with my face between my hands, I wondered what would be the end. Nothing seemed secure or certain, nothing even steady or amenable to foresight. Even guesswork or the wider cast of dreams was always wrong. To-day the hills, and valleys, and the glorious woods of wreathen gold, bright garnet, and deep amethyst, even that blue river yet unvexed by autumn's turbulence, and bordered with green pasture of a thousand sheep and cattle—to-day they all were mine (so far as mortal can hold ownership)—to-morrow, not a stick, or twig, or blade of grass, or fallen leaf, but might call me a trespasser. To see them while they still were mine, and to regard them humbly, I rose and took my black hat off—a black hat trimmed with mourning grey. Then turning round, I met a gaze, the wildest, darkest, and most awful ever fixed on human face.

'Who are you? What do you want here? I faltered forth, while shrinking back for flight, yet dreading or unable to withdraw my gaze

from his. The hollow ground barred all escape; my own land was a pit for me; and I must face this horror out. Here, afar from house or refuge, hand of help or eye of witness, front to front I must encounter this atrocious murderer.

For moments, which were ages to me, he stood there without a word; and daring not to take my eyes from his, lest he should leap at me, I had no power (except of instinct) and could form no thought of him; for mortal fear fell over me. If he would only speak, would only move his lips, or anything!

'The Baroness is not brave,' he said at last, as if reproachfully; 'but she need have no fear now of me. Does her ladyship happen to know who I am?'

'The man who murdered my grandfather.'

'Yes; if you put a false colour on events. The man who punished a miscreant, according to the truer light. But I am not here to argue points. I intend to propose a bargain. Once for all, I will not harm you. Try to listen calmly. Your father behaved like a man to me,

and I will be no worse to you. The state of the law in this country is such that I am forced to carry fire-arms. Will it conduce to your peace of mind if I place myself at your mercy?'

I tried to answer, but my heart was beating so that no voice came—only a flutter in my trembling throat. Wrath with myself for want of courage wrestled in vain with pale, abject fear. The hand which offered me the pistol seemed to my dazed eyes crimson still with the blood of my grandfather.

'You will not take it? Very well; it lies here at your service. If your father's daughter likes to shoot me, from one point of view it will be just; and but for one reason, I care not. Don't look at me with pity, if you please. For what I have done I feel no remorse, no shadow of repentance. It was the best action of my life. But time will fail, unless you call upon your courage speedily. None of your family lack that; and I know that you possess it. Call your spirit up, my dear."

'Oh, please not to call me that! How dare you call me that?'

'That is right. I did it on purpose. And yet I am your uncle. Not by the laws of men; but by the laws of God—if there are such things. Now, have you the strength to hear me?'

'Yes; I am quite recovered now. I can follow every word you say. But—but, I must sit down again.'

'Certainly. Sit there, and I will stand. I will not touch or come nearer to you than a story such as mine requires. You know your own side of it—now hear mine.

'More than fifty years ago, there was a brave young nobleman, handsome, rich, accomplished, strong, not given to drink or gambling, or any fashionable vices. His faults were few, and chiefly three—he had a headstrong will, loved money, and possessed no heart at all. With chances in his favour, this man might have done as most men do who have such gifts from fortune. But he happened to meet with a maiden far beneath him in this noble world; and he set his affections—such as they were—upon that poor young damsel.

'This was Winifred Hoyle, the daughter of

Thomas Hoyle, a farmer in a lonely part of Hampshire and among the moors of Rambledon. The nobleman lost his way while fishing, and, being thirsty, went to ask for milk. What matter how it came about? He managed to win her heart before she heard of his wealth and title. He persuaded her even to come and meet him, in the valley far from her father's house where he was wont to angle; and there, on a lonely wooden bridge across a little river, he knelt down (as men used to do) and pledged his solemn truth to her. His solemn lie—his solemn lie!

'Such love as his could not overleap the bars of rank or the pale of wealth—are you listening to me carefully?—or, at any rate, not both of them. If the poor farmer could only have given his Winifred £50,000, the peer would have dropped his pride, perhaps, so far as to be honest. But farmers in that land are poor, and Mr. Hoyle could give his only child his blessing only. And this he did in London, where his simple mind was all abroad, and he knew not church from chapel. He took his

daughter for the wife of a lord, and so she took herself, poor thing! when she was but his concubine. In 1809 such tricks were easily played by villains upon young girls so simple.

'But he gave her attestation and certificate under his own hand; and her poor father signed it, and saw it secured in a costly case, and then went home as proud as need be for the father of a peer, but swore to keep it three years secret, till the king should give consent. Such foul lies it was the pride of a lord to tell to a farmer.

'You do not exclaim—of course you do not. The instincts of your race are in you, because you are legitimate. Those of the robbed side are in me, because I am of the robbed. I am your father's elder brother. Which is worst, you proud young woman—the dastard or the bastard?'

'You have wrongs, most bitter wrongs,' I answered, meeting fierce eyes mildly; 'but you should remember that I am guiltless of those wrongs, and so was my father. And I think

that if you talk of birth so, you must know that gentlemen speak quietly to ladies.'

'What concern is that of mine? A gentleman is some one's son. I am the son of nobody. But to you I will speak quietly, for the sake of your poor father. And you must listen quietly. I am not famous for sweet temper. Well, this great lord took his toy to Paris, where he had her at his mercy. She could not speak a word of French; she did not know a single soul. In vain she prayed him to take her to his English home; or, if not that, to restore her to her father. Not to be too long about it—any more than he was—a few months were enough for him. He found fault with her manners, with her speech, her dress, her everything—all which he had right, perhaps, to do, but should have used it earlier. And she, although not born to the noble privilege of weariness, had been an old man's darling, and could not put up with harshness. From words they came to worse; until he struck her, told her of her shame, or rather his own infamy, and left her

among strangers, helpless, penniless, and broken-hearted, to endure the consequence.

'There and thus I saw the light, beneath most noble auspices. But I need not go on with all that. As long as human rules remain, this happy tale will always be repeated with immense applause. My mother's love was turned to bitter hatred of his lordship, and, when her father died from grief, to eager thirst for vengeance. And for this purpose I was born.

'You see that—for a bastard—I have been fairly educated; but not a farthing did his lordship ever pay for that, or even to support his casual. My grandfather Hoyle left his little all to his daughter Winifred; and upon that, and my mother's toil and mine, we have kept alive. Losing sight of my mother gladly—for she was full of pride, and hoped no more to trouble him after getting her father's property—he married again, or rather he married for the first time without perjury, which enables the man to escape from it. She was of his own rank—as you know—the daughter of an earl, and not of a farmer. It would not have been safe to

mock her, would it? And there was no temptation.

'The history of my mother and myself does not concern you. Such people are of no account until they grow dangerous to the great. We lived in cheap places, and wandered about, caring for no one, and cared for by the same. Mrs. Hoyle and Thomas Hoyle we called ourselves when we wanted names; and I did not even know the story of our wrongs till the heat and fury of youth were past. Both for her own sake and mine, my mother concealed it from me. Pride and habit, perhaps, had dulled her just desire for vengeance; and, knowing what I was, she feared the thing which has befallen me. But when I was close upon thirty years old, and my mother eight-and-forty—for she was betrayed in her teens—a sudden illness seized her. Believing her death to be near, she told me, as calmly as possible, everything; with all those large, quiet views of the past which at such a time seem the regular thing, but make the wrong tenfold blacker. She did not die; if she had, it might have been

better both for her and me, and many other people. Are you tired of my tale? Or do you want to hear the rest?'

'You cannot be asking me in earnest,' I replied, while I watched his wild eyes carefully. 'Tell me the rest, if you are not afraid.'

'Afraid, indeed! Then, for want of that proper tendance and comfort which a few pounds would have brought her, although she survived, she survived as a wreck, the mere relic and ruin of her poor unhappy self. I sank my pride for her sake, and even deigned to write to him, in rank and wealth so far above me, in everything else such a clot below my heel. He did the most arrogant thing a snob can do—he never answered my letter.

'I scraped together a little money, and made my way to England, and came to that house—which you now call yours—and bearded that noble nobleman—that father to be so proud of! He was getting on now in years, and growing perhaps a little nervous; and my first appearance scared him. He got no obeisance from me, you may be certain, but

still I did not revile him. I told him of my mother's state of mind, and the great care she required, and demanded that in common justice, he, having brought her to this, should help her. But nothing would he promise, not a sixpence even, in the way of regular allowance. Anything of that sort could only be arranged by means of his solicitors. He had so expensive a son with a very large and growing family, that he could not be pledged to any yearly sum. But if I would take a draft for £100, and sign an acquittance in full of all claims, I might have it, upon proving my identity.

'What identity had I to prove? He had taken good care of that. I turned my back on him, and left the house, without even asking for his curse, though as precious as a good man's blessing.

'It was a wild and windy night, but with a bright moon rising, and going across this park—or whatever it is called—I met my brother. At a crest of the road we met face to face, with the moon across our foreheads. We had never met till now, nor even heard of one another;

at least he had never heard of me. He started back as if at his own ghost; but I had nothing to be startled at in this world or the other.

'I made his acquaintance, with deference of course; and we got on very well together. At one time it seemed good luck for him to have illegitimate kindred; for I saved his life when he was tangled in the weeds of this river while bathing. You owe me no thanks. I thought twice about it, and if the name would have ended with him I would never have used my basket-knife. By trade I am a basket-maker, like many another "love-child."

'However, he was grateful, if ever anybody was, for I ran some risk in doing it; and he always did his very best for me, and encouraged me to visit him. Not at his home—of course that would never do—but when he was with his regiment. Short of money as he always was, through his father's nature and his own, which in some points were the very opposite, he was even desirous to give me some of that; but I never took a farthing from him. If I had it at

all, I would have it from the proper one. And from him I resolved to have it.

'How terrified you look! I am coming to it now. Are you sure that you can bear it? It is nothing very harrowing; but still young ladies—'

'I feel a little faint,' I could not help saying; 'but that is nothing. I must hear the whole of it. Please to go on without minding me.'

'For my own sake I will not, as well as for yours. I cannot have you fainting, and bringing people here. Go to the house and take food, and recover your strength, and then come here again. I promise to be here; and your father's daughter will not take advantage of my kindness.'

Though his eyes were fierce (instead of being sad) and full of sad, tempestuous light, they bore some likeness to my father's, and asserted power over me. Reluctant as I was, I obeyed this man, and left him there and went slowly to the house, walking as if in a troubled dream.

CHAPTER LII.

FOR LIFE, DEATH.

Upon my return, I saw nothing for a time but fans and feathers of browning fern, dark shags of ling, and podded spurs of broom and furze, and wisps of grass. With great relief (of which I felt ashamed while even breathing it) I thought that the man was afraid to tell the rest of his story, and had fled; but ere my cowardice had much time for self-congratulation, a tall figure rose from the ground, and fear compelled me into courage. For throughout this long interview, more and more I felt an extremely unpleasant conviction. That stranger might not be a downright madman, nor even what is called a lunatic; but still it was clear that upon certain points—the laws of this country, for instance, and the value of rank and station—his opinions were so outrageous that

his reason must be affected. And, even without such proofs as these, his eyes and his manner were quite enough. Therefore, I had need of no small caution, not only concerning my words and gestures, but as to my looks and even thoughts; for he seemed to divine these last as quickly as they flashed across me. I never had learned to conceal my thoughts, and this first lesson was an awkward one.

'I hope you are better,' he said, as kindly as it was possible for him to speak. 'Now have no fear of me, once more I tell you. I will not sham any admiration, affection, or anything of that kind; but as for harming you—why, your father was almost the only kind heart I ever met.'

'Then why did you send a most vile man to fetch me, when my father was dead in the desert?'

'I never did anything of the sort! It was done in my name, but not by me; I never even heard of it until long after, and I have a score to settle with the man who did it.'

'But Mr. Goad told me himself that you

came and said you were the true Lord Castlewood, and ordered him at once to America! I never saw truth more plainly stamped on a new situation—the face of a rogue—than I saw it then on the face of Mr. Goad.'

'You are quite right; he spoke the truth—to the utmost of his knowledge. I never saw Goad, and he never saw me! I never even dreamed of pretending to the title. I was personated by a mean, low friend of Sir Montague Hockin; base-born as I am, I would never stoop to such a trick. You will find out the meaning of that by-and-by. I have taken the law into my own hands—it is the only way to work such laws—I have committed what is called a crime. But, compared with Sir Montague Hockin, I am whiter than yonder shearling on his way to the river for his evening drink.'

I gazed at his face, and could well believe it. The setting sun shone upon his chin and forehead—good, resolute, well-marked features; his nose and mouth were keen and clear, his cheeks curt and pale (though they would have been better for being a trifle cleaner). There was

nothing suggestive of falsehood or fraud, and but for the wildness of the eyes and flashes o cold ferocity, it might have been called a handsome face.

'Very well,' he began again, with one of those jerks which had frightened me, 'your father was kind to me, very kind indeed; but he knew the old lord too well to attempt to interpose on my behalf. On the other hand, he gave no warning of my manifest resolve; perhaps he thought it a woman's threat, and me no better than a woman! And partly for his sake, no doubt, though mainly for my mother's, I made the short work which I made; for he was horribly straitened — and in his free, light way he told me so—by his hard curmudgeon of a father.

'To that man, hopeless as he was, I gave fair grace, however, and plenty of openings for repentance. None of them would he embrace, and he thought scorn of my lenity. And I might have gone on with such weakness longer, if I had not heard that his coach-and-four were ordered for the Moonstock Inn.

'That he should dare thus to pollute the spot where he had so forsworn himself! I resolved that there he should pay justice, either with his life or death. And I went to your father's place to tell him to prepare for disturbances; but he was gone to see his wife, and I simply borrowed a pistol.

'Now, you need not be at all afraid nor shrink away from me like that. I was bound upon stricter justice than any judge that sets forth on circuit; and I meant to give, and did give, what no judge affords to the guilty—the chance of leading a better life. I had brought my mother to England, and she was in a poor place in London; her mind was failing more and more, and reverting to her love-time, the one short happiness of her life. "If I could but see him, if I could but see him, and show him his tall and clever son, he would forgive me all my sin in thinking ever to be his wife. Oh, Thomas! I was too young to know it. If I could but see him once, just once!"

'How all this drove me no tongue can tell. But I never let her know it, I only said:

"Mother, he shall come and see you, if he ever sees anybody more!" And she trusted me, and was satisfied. She only said: "Take my picture, Thomas, to remind him of the happy time, and his pledge to me inside of it." And she gave me what she had kept for years in a bag of chamois leather, the case of which I spoke before; which even in our hardest times she would never send to the pawnshop.

'The rest is simple enough. I swore by the God, or the Devil, who made me, that this black-hearted man should yield either his arrogance or his life. I followed him to the Moon valley, and fate ordained that I should meet him where he forswore himself to my mother; on that very plank where he had breathed his deadly lies he breathed his last. Would you like to hear all about it?'

For answer I only bowed my head. His calm, methodical way of telling his tale, like a common adventure with a dog, was more shocking than any fury.

'Then it was this. I watched him from the Moonstock Inn to a house in the village, where

he dined with company; and I did not even know that it was the house of his son, your father; so great a gulf is fixed between the legitimate and the bastard! He had crossed the wooden bridge in going, and was sure to cross it in coming back. How he could tread those planks without contrition and horror—but never mind. I resolved to bring him to a quiet parley there, and I waited in the valley.

'The night was soft, and dark in patches where the land or wood closed in; and the stream was brown and threw no light, though the moon was on the uplands. Time and place alike were fit for our little explanation. The path wound down the meadow towards me, and I knew that he must come. My firm intention was to spare him, if he gave me a chance of it; but he never had the manners to do that.

'Here I waited, with the cold leaves fluttering around me, until I heard a firm, slow step coming down the narrow path. Then a figure appeared in a stripe of moonlight, and stopped and rested on a staff. Perhaps his lordship's mind went back some five-and-thirty years, to

times when he told pretty stories here; and perhaps he laughed to himself to think how well he had got out of it. Whatever his meditations were, I let him have them out, and waited.

'If he had even sighed I might have felt more kindness towards him; but he only gave something between a cough and a grunt, and I clearly heard him say: "Gout to-morrow morning! what the devil did I drink port wine for?" He struck the ground with his stick and came onward, thinking far more of his feet than heart.

'Then, as he planted one foot gingerly on the timber and stayed himself, I leaped along the bridge and met him, and without a word looked at him. The moon was topping the crest of the hills and threw my shadow upon him, the last that ever fell upon his body to its knowledge.

'"Fellow, out of the way!" he cried, with a most commanding voice and air, though only too well he knew me; and my wrath against him began to rise.

'"You pass not here, and you never make

another live step on this earth," I said, as calmly as now I speak, "unless you obey my orders."

'He saw his peril, but he had courage—perhaps his only virtue. "Fool! whoever you are," he shouted, that his voice might fetch him help; "none of these moonstruck ways with me! If you want to rob me, try it!"

'"You know too well who I am," I answered, as he made to push me back. "Lord Castlewood, here you have the choice—to lick the dust, or be dust! Here you forswore yourself, here you pay for perjury. On this plank you knelt to poor Winifred Hoyle, whom you ruined and cast by; and now on this plank you shall kneel to her son and swear to obey him—or else you die!"

'In spite of all his pride, he trembled as if I had been Death himself, instead of his own dear eldest son.

'"What do you want?" As he asked, he laid one hand on the rickety rail and shook it, and the dark old tree behind him shook. "How much will satisfy you?"

'"Miser, none of your money for us! it is

too late for your half-crowns! We must have a little of what you have grudged—having none to spare—your honour. My demands are simple, and only two. My mother is fool enough to yearn for one more sight of your false face; you will come with me and see her."

'"And if I yield to that, what next?"

'"The next thing is a trifle to a nobleman like you. Here I have, in this blue trinket (false gems and false gold, of course), your solemn signature to a lie. At the foot of that you will have the truth to write "I am a perjured liar!" and proudly sign it "Castlewood," in the presence of two witnesses. This cannot hurt your feelings much, and it need not be expensive!"

'Fury flashed in his bright old eyes, but he strove to check its outbreak. The gleaning of life, after threescore years, was better, in such lordly fields, than the whole of the harvest we get. He knew that I had him all to myself, to indulge my filial affection.

'"You have been misled; you have never heard the truth; you have only heard your

mother's story. Allow me to go back, and to sit in a dry place—I am tired, and no longer young—you are bound to hear my tale as well. I passed a dry stump just now, I will go back; there is no fear of interruption." My lord was talking against time.

'"From this bridge you do not budge until you have gone on your knees, and sworn what I shall dictate to you; this time it shall be no perjury. Here I hold your cursed pledge——"

'He struck at me, or at the locket—no matter which—but it flew away. My right arm was crippled by his heavy stick; but I am left-handed, as a bastard should be. From my left hand he took his death, and I threw the pistol after him; such love had he earned from his love-child!'

Thomas Castlewood, or Hoyle, or whatever else his name was, here broke off from his miserable words, and, forgetting all about my presence, set his gloomy eyes on the ground. Lightly he might try to speak, but there was no lightness in his mind, and no spark of light in his poor dead soul. Being so young, and unacquainted with the turns of life-worn mind, I

was afraid to say a word except to myself; and to myself I only said: 'The man is mad, poor fellow; and no wonder!'

The sun was setting, not upon the vast Pacific from desert heights, but over the quiet hills and through the soft valleys of tame England; and, different as the whole scene was, a certain other sad and fearful sunset lay before me. The fall of night upon my dying father and his helpless child, the hour of anguish and despair! Here at last was the cause of all laid horribly before me; and the pity deeply moving me passed into cold abhorrence. But the man was lost in his own visions.

'So in your savage wrath,' I said, 'you killed your own father, and in your fright left mine to bear the brunt of it.'

He raised his dark eyes heavily, and his thoughts were far astray from mine. He did not know what I had said, though he knew that I had spoken. The labour of calling to mind and telling his treatment of his father had worked upon him so much that he could not freely shift attention.

'I came for something, something that can

be only had from you,' he said, 'and only since your cousin's death, and something most important. But will you believe me? it is wholly gone, gone from mind and memory!'

'I am not surprised at that,' I answered, looking at his large, wan face, and while I did so losing half my horror in strange sadness; 'whatever it is, I will do it for you; only let me know by post.'

'I see what you mean—not to come any more; you are right about that, for certain. But your father was good to me, and I loved him; though I had no right to love any one. My letter will show that I wronged him never. The weight of the world is off my mind since I have told you everything; you can send me to the gallows, if you think fit, but leave it till my mother dies. Good-bye, poor child; I have spoiled your life, but only by chance consequence, not in murder-birth—as I was born.'

Before I could answer or call him back, if I even wished to do so, he was far away, with his long, quiet stride; and, like his life, his shadow fell, chilling, sombre, cast away.

CHAPTER LIII

BRUNTSEA DEFIANT.

Thus at last—by no direct exertion of my own, but by turn after turn of things, to which I blindly gave my little help—the mystery of my life was solved. Many things yet remained to be fetched up to focus, and seen round; but the point of points was settled.

Of all concerned, my father alone stood blameless and heroic. What tears of shame and pride I shed for ever having doubted him! Not doubting his innocence of the crime itself, but his motives for taking it upon him. I had been mean enough to dream that my dear father outraged justice to conceal his own base birth!

That ever such thought should have entered my mind may not make me charitable to the wicked thoughts of the world at large; but at any rate, it ought to do so. And the man in

question, my own father, who had starved himself to save me! Better had I been the most illegal child ever issued into this cold world than dare to think so of my father, and then find him the model of everything.

To hide the perjury, avarice, and cowardice of his father, and to appease the bitter wrong, he had even bowed to take the dark suspicion on himself, until his wronged and half-sane brother (to whom, moreover, he owed his life) should have time to fly from England. No doubt he blamed himself as much as he condemned the wretched criminal, because he had left his father so long unwarned and so unguarded, and had thoughtlessly used light words about him, which fell not lightly on a stern, distempered mind. Hence, perhaps, the exclamation, which had told against him so.

And then, when he broke jail—which also told against him terribly—to revisit his shattered home, it is likely enough that he meant after that to declare the truth and stand his trial, as a man should do. But his wife, perhaps, in her poor weak state, could not endure the thought of it,

knowing how often jury is injury, and seeing all the weight against him. She naturally pledged him to pursue his flight 'for her sake;' until she should be better able to endure his trial, and until he should have more than his own pure word and character to show. And probably if he had then been tried, with so many things against him, and no production of that poor brother, his tale would have seemed but a flimsy invention, and 'guilty' would have been the verdict. And they could not know that, in such case, the guilty man would have come forward, as we shall see that he meant to do.

When my father heard of his dear wife's death, and believed no doubt that I was buried with the rest, the gloom of a broken and fated man, like Polar night, settled down on him. What matter to him about public opinion, or anything else in the world just now? The sins of his father were on his head; let them rest there rather than be trumpeted by him. He had nothing to care for; let him wander about. And so he did for several years, until I became

a treasure to him—for parental is not intrinsic value—and then for my sake, as now appeared, he betook us both to a large, kind land.

Revolving these things sadly, and a great many more which need not be told, I thought it my duty to go as soon as possible to Bruntsea, and tell my good and faithful friends what I was loth to write about. There, moreover, I could obtain what I wanted to confirm me—the opinion of an upright, law-abiding, honourable man—about the course I proposed to take. And there I might hear something more as to a thing which had troubled me much in the deepest of my own troubles—the melancholy plight of dear Uncle Sam. Wild and absurd as it may appear to people of no gratitude, my heart was set upon faring forth in search of the noble Sawyer; if only it could be reconciled with my duty here in England. That such a proceeding would avail but little seemed now, alas, too manifest; but a plea of that kind generally means that we have no mind to do a thing.

Be that as it will, I made what my dear Yankees—to use the Major's impertinent phrase

—call 'straight tracks' for that ancient and obsolete town, rejuvenized now by its Signor. The cause of my good friend's silence—not to use that affected word 'reticence'—was quite unknown to me, and disturbed my spirit with futile guesses.

Resolute, therefore, to pierce the bottom of every surviving mystery, I made claim upon 'Mr. Stixon, junior'—as 'Stixon's boy' had now vindicated his right to be called, up to supper-time—and he with high chivalry responded. Not yet was he wedded to Miss Polly Hopkins, the daughter of the pickled porkman; otherwise would he, or could he have made telegraphic blush at the word 'Bruntsea?' And would he have been quite so eager to come?

Such things are trifling, compared to our own, which naturally fill the universe. I was bound to be a great lady now, and patronise, and regulate, and drill all the doings of nature. So I durst not even ask, though desiring much to do so, how young Mr. Stixon was getting on with his delightful Polly. And his father, as

soon as he found me turned into the Mistress, and 'his lady' (as he would have me called thenceforth, whether or no, on my part), not another word would he tell me of the household sentiments, politics, or romances. It would have been thought a thing beneath me to put any nice little questions now; and I was obliged to take up the tone which others used towards me. But all the while I longed for freedom, Uncle Sam, Suan Isco, and even Martin of the Mill.

Law business, however, and other hindrances, kept me from starting at once for Bruntsea, impatient as I was to do so. Indeed, it was not until the morning of the last Saturday in November that I was able to get away. The weather had turned to much rain, I remember, with two or three tempestuous nights, and the woods were almost bare of leaves, and the Thames looked brown and violent.

In the fly from Newport to Bruntsea I heard great rollers thundering heavily upon the steep bar of shingle, and such a lake of water shone in the old bed of the river that I quite believed at first that the Major had carried out his grand

idea, and brought the river back again. But the flyman shook his head, and looked very serious, and told me that he feared bad times were coming. What I saw was the work of the Lord in heaven, and no man could prevail against it. He had always said, though no concern of his—for he belonged to Newport—that even a British officer could not fly in the face of the Almighty. He himself had a brother on the works, regular employed, and drawing good money, and proud enough about it; and the times he had told him across a pint of ale—howsomever our place was to hope for the best; but the top of the springs was not come yet, and a pilot out of Newport told him the water was making uncommon strong; but he did hope the wind had nigh blowed itself out; if not, they would have to look blessed sharp to-morrow. He had heard say that in time of Queen Elizabeth six score of houses was washed clean away, and the river itself knocked right into the sea; and a thing as had been once might just come to pass again, though folk was all so clever now they thought they wor

above it. But for all that their grandfathers' goggles might fit them. But here we was in Bruntsea-town, and bless his old eyes—yes! If I pleased to look along his whip, I might see ancient pilot come, he did believe to warn of them!

Following his guidance, I descried a stout old man, in a sailor's dress, weather-proof hat, and long boots, standing on a low sea-wall and holding vehement converse with some Bruntsea boatmen and fishermen, who were sprawling on the stones as usual.

'Driver, you know him. Take the lower road,' I said, 'and ask what his opinion is.'

'No need to ask him,' the flyman answered; 'old Banks would never be here, Miss, if he was of two opinions. He hath come to fetch his daughter out of harm, I doubt, the wife of that there Bishop Jim, they call him—the chap with two nails to his thumb, you know. Would you like to hear how they all take it, Miss?'

With these words he turned to the right, and drove into Major Hockin's 'Sea-parade.' There we stopped to hear what was going on,

and it proved to be well worth our attention. The old pilot perhaps had exhausted reason, and now was beginning to give way to wrath. The afternoon was deepening fast, with heavy grey clouds lowering, showing no definite edge, but streaked with hazy lines and spotted by some little murky blurs or blots, like tar-pots, carried slowly.

'Hath Noah's Ark ever told a lie?' the ancient pilot shouted, pointing with one hand at these, and with a clenched fist at the sea, whence came puffs of sullen air, and turned his grey locks backward. 'Mackerel sky when the sun got up, mermaidens' eggs at noon, and now afore sunset Noah's Arks! Any of them breweth a gale of wind, and the three of them bodes a tempest. And the top of the springs of the year to-morrow—are ye daft, or all gone upon the spree, my men? Your fathers would a' knowed what the new moon meant; is this all that cometh out of larning to read?'

'Have a pinch of 'bacco, old man,' said one, 'to help you off with that stiff reel. What consarn can he be of yourn?'

'Don't you be put out, mate,' cried another; 'never came sea as could top that bar, and never will in our time. Go and caulk your old leaky craft, Master Banks.'

'We have rode out a good many gales without seeking prophet from Newport—a place never heerd on when this old town was made.'

'Come and whet your old whistle at the "Hockin Arms," Banks. You must want it after that long pipe.'

'Hockin Arms, indeed!' the pilot answered, turning away in a rage from them; 'what Hockin Arms will there be this time to-morrow? Hockin legs wanted, more likely, and Hockin wings, perhaps. And you poor grinning ninnies, as ought to have four legs, ye'll be praying that ye had them to-morrow. However, ye've had warning, and ye can't blame me. The power of the Lord is in the air and sea. Is this the sort of stuff ye trust in?'

He set one foot against our Major's wall—an action scarcely honest, while it was so green—and, coming from a hale and very thick-set man, the contemptuous push sent a fathom of

it outwards. Rattle, rattle went the new patent concrete, starting up the lazy-pated fellows down below.

'You'll try the walls of a jail,' cried one. 'You go to Noah's Ark,' shouted another; the rest bade him go to a place much worse; but he buttoned his jacket in disdain, and marched away without spoiling the effect by any more weak words.

'Right you are,' cried my flyman; 'right you are, Master Banks. Them lubbers will sing another song to-morrow. Gee up, old hoss, then!'

All this, and the ominous scowl of the sky and menacing roar of the sea (already crowding with black rollers), disturbed me so that I could say nothing, until at the corner of the grand new hotel we met Major Hockin himself, attired in a workman's loose jacket, and carrying a shovel. He was covered with mud and dried flakes of froth, and even his short white whiskers were encrusted with sparkles of brine; but his face was ruddy and smiling, and his manner as hearty as ever.

'You here, Erema! Oh, I beg pardon, Baroness Castlewood, if you please. My dear, again I congratulate you.'

'You have as little cause to do that as I fear I can find in your case. You have no news for me from America? How sad! But what a poor plight you yourself are in.'

'Not a bit of it. At first sight you might think so; and we certainly have had a very busy time. Send back the fly. Leave your bag at our hotel. Porter, be quick with Lady Castlewood's luggage. One piece of luck befalls me—to receive so often this beautiful hand. What a lot of young fellows now would die of envy——'

'I am glad that you still can talk nonsense,' I said; 'for I truly was frightened at this great lake, and so many of your houses even standing in the water.'

'It will do them good. It will settle the foundations, and crystallize the mortar. They will look twice as well when they come out again, and never have rats or black beetles. We were foolish enough to be frightened at

first; and there may have been danger a fortnight ago. But since that tide we have worked day and night, and everything is now so stable that fear is simply ridiculous. On the whole, it has been a most excellent thing. Quite the making, in fact, of Bruntsea.'

'Then Bruntsea must be made of water,' I replied, gazing sadly at the gulf which parted us from the Sea Parade, the Lyceum, and Baths, the Bastion-Promenade, and so on; beyond all which the streaky turmoil and misty scud of the waves were seen.

'Made of beer more likely,' he retorted with a laugh. 'If my fellows worked like horses—which they did—they also drank like fishes. Their mouths were so dry with the pickle, they said. But the total abstainers were the worst, being out of practice with the can. However, let us make no complaints. We ought to be truly thankful; and I shall miss the exercise. That is why you have heard so little from me. You see the position at a glance. I have never been to Paris at all, Erema. I have not rubbed up my parleywoo with a blast from Mr. Bellows.

I was stopped by a telegram about this job—*acrior illum*—I had some Latin once, quite enough for the House of Commons, but it all oozed out at my elbows; and to ladies (by some superstition) it is rude—though they treat us to bad French enough. Never mind; what I wanted to say is this, that I have done nothing, but respected your sad trouble—for you took a wild fancy to that poor bed-ridden, who never did you a stroke of good, except about Cosmopolitan Jack, and whose removal has come at the very nick of time; for what could you have done for money, with the Yankees cutting each other's throats, and your nugget quite sure to be annexed; or at the very best squared up in greenbacks?'

'You ought not to speak so, Major Hockin. If all your plans were not under water, I should be quite put out with you. My cousin was not bed-ridden; neither was he at all incapable, as you have called him once or twice. He was an infinitely superior man to—to what one generally sees; and when you have heard what I have to tell, in his place you would have done

just as he did. And as for money, and 'happy release'—as the people who never want it for themselves express it—such words simply sicken me; at great times, they are so sordid.'

'What is there in this world that is not sordid—to the young, in one sense, and to the old in another?'

Major Hockin so seldom spoke in this didactic way, and I was so unable to make it out, that, having expected some tiff on his part at my juvenile arrogance, I was just in the mould for a deep impression from sudden stamp of philosophy. I had nothing to say in reply, and he went up in my opinion greatly.

He knew it; and he said with touching kindness, 'Erema, come and see your dear Aunt Mary. She has had an attack of rheumatic gout in her thimble-finger, and her maids have worried her out of her life, and by far the most brilliant of her cocks (worth £20, they tell me) breathed his last on Sunday night, with gapes, or croup, or something. This is why you have not heard again from her. I have been in the trenches day and night stoning

out the sea with his own stones, by a new form of concrete discovered by myself. And unless I am very much mistaken—in fact I do not hesitate to say—but such things are not in your line at all. Let us go up to the house. Our job is done; and I think Master Neptune may pound away in vain. I have got a new range in the kitchen now, partly of my own invention; you can roast, or bake, or steam, or stew, or frizzle kabobs—all by turning a screw. And not only that, but you can keep things hot, piping hot, and ripening as it were, better than when they first were done. Instead of any burnt iron taste or scum on the gravy, or clottiness, they mellow by waiting, and make their own sauce. If I ever have time, I shall patent this invention; why, you may burn brick-dust in it, bath-brick, hearthstone, or potsherds! At any hour of the day or night while the sea is in this condition, I may want my dinner; and there we have it. We say grace immediately, and down we sit. Let us take it by surprise, if it can be taken so. Up through my chief drive, instanter! I think that I scarcely ever felt more hungry. The

thought of that range always sets me off. And one of its countless beauties is the noble, juicy fragrance.'

Major Hockin certainly possessed the art—so meritorious in a host—of making people hungry; and we mounted the hill with alacrity, after passing his letter-box, which reminded me of the mysterious lady. He pointed to 'Desolate Hole,' as he called it, and said that he believed she was there still, though she never came out now to watch their house. And a man of dark and repelling aspect had been seen once or twice by his workmen, during the time of their night relays, rapidly walking towards Desolate Hole. How any one could live in such a place, with the roar and the spray of the sea, as it had been, at the very door, and, through the windows, some people might understand, but not the Major.

Good Mrs. Hockin received me with her usual warmth and kindness, and scolded me for having failed to write more to her, as all people seem to do when conscious of having neglected that duty themselves. Then she showed me

her thimble-finger, which certainly was a little swollen; and then she poured forth her gratitude for her many blessings, as she always did after any little piece of grumbling. And I told her that, if at her age I were only a quarter as pleasant and sweet of temper, I should consider myself a blessing to any man.

After dinner, my host produced the locket which he had kept for the purpose of showing it to the artist's son in Paris, and which he admired so intensely that I wished it were mine to bestow on him. Then I told him that, through a thing wholly unexpected—the confession of the criminal himself—no journey to Paris was needful now. I repeated that strange and gloomy tale, to the loud accompaniment of a rising wind and roaring sea, while both my friends listened intently.

'Now what can have led him so to come to you?' they asked; 'and what do you mean to do about it?'

'He came to me, no doubt, to propose some bargain, which could not be made in my cousin's lifetime. But the telling of his tale

made him feel so strange that he really could not remember what it was. As to what I am to do, I must beg for your opinion; such a case is beyond my decision.' Mrs. Hockin began to reply, but stopped, looking dutifully at her lord.

'There is no doubt what you are bound to do, at least in one way,' the Major said; 'you are a British subject, I suppose, and you must obey the laws of the country. A man has confessed to you a murder—no matter whether it was committed twenty years ago, or two minutes; no matter whether it was a savage, cold-blooded, premeditated crime, or whether there were things to palliate it. Your course is the same; you must hand him over. In fact, you ought never to have let him go.'

'How could I help it?' I pleaded, with surprise; 'it was impossible for me to hold him.'

'Then you should have shot him with his own pistol. He offered it to you. You should have grasped it, pointed it at his heart, and told him that he was a dead man if he stirred.'

'Aunt Mary, would you have done that?'

I asked. ‘It is so easy to talk of fine things. But in the first place, I had no wish to stop him; and in the next I could not, if I had.’

‘My dear,’ Mrs. Hockin replied, perceiving my distress at this view of the subject, ‘I should have done exactly what you did. If the laws of this country ordain that women are to carry them out against great strong men, who after all have been sadly injured, why it proves that women ought to make the laws, which to my mind is simply ridiculous.’

CHAPTER LIV.

BRUNTSEA DEFEATED.

Little sleep had I that night. Such conflict was in my mind about the proper thing to be done next, and such a war of the wind outside, above and between the distant uproar of the long, tumultuous sea. Of that sound much was intercepted by the dead bulk of the cliff, but the wind swung fiercely over this, and rattled through all shelter. In the morning the storm was furious; but the Major declared that his weather-glass had turned, which proved that the gale was breaking. The top of the tide would be at one o'clock, and after church we should behold a sight he was rather proud of —the impotent wrath of the wind and tide against his patent concrete.

'My dear, I scarcely like such talk,' Mrs. Hockin gently interposed. 'To me it seems

almost defiant of the power of the Lord. Remember what happened to poor Smeaton—at least I think his name was Smeaton, or Stanley was it? But I dare say you know best. He defied the strength of the Lord, like the people at the mouth of their tent, and he was swallowed up.'

'Mary, my dear, get your prayer-book. Rasper's fly is waiting for us, and the parson has no manners. When he drops off, I present to the living; and I am not at all sure that I shall let George have it. He is fond of processions, and all that stuff. The only procession in the Church of England is that of the lord of the manor to his pew. I will be the master in my own church.'

'Of course, dear, of course; so you ought to be. It always was so in my father's parish. But you must not speak so of our poor George. He may be "High Church," as they call it; but he knows what is due to his family, and he has a large one coming.'

We set off hastily for the church, through blasts of rain and buffets of wind, which threat-

ened to overturn the cab, and the seaward window was white, as in a snowstorm, with pellets of froth and the drift of sea-scud. I tried to look out, but the blur and the dash obscured the sight of everything. And though in this lower road we were partly sheltered by the pebble-ridge, the driver was several times obliged to pull his poor horse up and face the wind, for fear of our being blown over.

That ancient church, with its red-tiled spire, stands well up in the good old town, at the head of a street whose principal object now certainly is to lead to it. Three hundred years ago that street had business of its own to think of, and was brave perhaps with fine men and maids at the time of the Spanish Armada. Its only bravery now was the good old church, and some queer gables, and a crypt (which was true to itself, by being buried up to the spandrils), and one or two corners, where saints used to stand, until they were pelted out of them, and where fisher-like men, in the lodging season, stand selling fish caught at Billingsgate. But to Bruntsea itself the great glory of that street was

rather of hope than of memory. Bailiff Hopkins had taken out three latticed windows, and put in one grand one of plate glass, with 'finishing' blinds all varnished. And even on a Sunday morning Bruntsea wanted to know whatever the Bailiff was at behind them. Some said that he did all his pickling on a Sunday; and by putting up 'spectacle glass,' he had challenged the oldest inhabitant to come and try his focus.

Despite all the rattle and roar of the wind, we went on in church as usual. The vicar had a stout young curate from Durham, who could outshout any tempest, with a good stone wall between them; and the Bruntsea folk were of thicker constitution than to care an old hat for the weather. Whatever was 'sent by the Lord' they took with a grumble, but no excitement. The clock in front of the gallery told the time of the day as five minutes to twelve when the vicar, a pleasant, old-fashioned man, pronounced his text, which he always did thrice over to make us sure of it. And then he hitched up his old black gown, and directed his gaze at the lord of the manor, to impress the whole

church with authority. Major Hockin acknowledged in a proper manner this courtesy of the minister, by rubbing up his crest and looking even more wide awake than usual; whereas Aunt Mary, whose kind heart longed to see her own son in that pulpit, calmly settled back her shoulders and arranged her head and eyes so well as to seem at a distance in rapt attention, while having a nice little dream of her own. But suddenly all was broken up. The sexton (whose licence as warden of the church, and even whose duty it was to hear the sermon only fitfully, from the tower arch, where he watched the boys, and sniffed the bakehouse of his own dinner), to the consternation of everybody, this faithful man ran up the nave, with his hands above his head, and shouted:

'All Brownzee be awash, awash'—sounding it so as to rhyme with 'lash'—'the zea, the zea be all over us.'

The clergyman in the pulpit turned and looked through a window behind him, while all the congregation rose.

'It is too true,' the preacher cried; 'the

sea is in over the bank, my friends. Every man must rush to his own home. The blessing of the Lord be on you through His fearful visitation!'

He had no time to say more; and we thought it very brave of him to say that, for his own house was in the lower village, and there he had a wife and children sick. In half a minute the church was empty, and the street below it full of people, striving and struggling against the blast, and breasting it at an incline like swimmers, but beaten back ever and anon and hurled against one another, with tattered umbrellas, hats gone, and bonnets hanging. And among them, like gulls before the wind, blew dollops of spray and chunks of froth, with every now and then a slate or pantile.

All this was so bad that scarcely anybody found power to speak, or think, or see. The Major did his very best to lead us, but could by no means manage it. And I screamed into his soundest ear to pull Aunt Mary into some dry house—for she could not face such buffeting—and to let me fare for myself as I might. So

we left Mrs. Hockin in the Bailiff's house, though she wanted sadly to come with us, and on we went to behold the worst. And thus, by running the byes of the wind, and craftily hugging the corners, we got to the foot of the street at last, and then could go no further.

For here was the very sea itself, with furious billows panting. Before us rolled and ran a fearful surf of crested whiteness, torn by the screeching squalls, and tossed in clashing tufts and pinnacles. And into these came, sweeping over the shattered chine of shingle, gigantic surges from the outer deep, towering, as they crossed the bar, and combing against the sky-line, then rushing onward, and driving the huddle of the ponded waves before them.

The tide was yet rising, and at every blow the wreck and the havoc grew worse and worse. That long sweep of brickwork, the 'Grand Promenade,' bowed and bulged, with wall and window knuckled in and out, like wattles; the 'sea-parade' was a parade of sea; and a bathing machine wheels upward lay, like a wrecked

Noah's Ark, on the top of the 'Saline-Silico-Calcareous Baths.'

The Major stood by me, while all his constructions 'went by the board,' as they say at sea; and verily everything was at sea. I grieved for him so that it was not the spray alone that put salt drops on my cheeks. And I could not bear to turn and look at his good old weather-beaten face. But he was not the man to brood upon his woes in silence. He might have used nicer language perhaps, but his inner sense was manful.

'I don't care a damn,' he shouted, so that all the women heard him; 'I can only say I am devilish glad that I never let one of those houses.'

There was a little band of seamen, under the shelter of a garden-wall, crouching, or sitting, or standing (or whatever may be the attitude acquired by much voyaging and experience of bad weather, which cannot be solved as to centre of gravity, even by the man who does it), and these men were so taken with the Major's manifesto, clenched at once

and clarified to them by strong, short language, that they gave him a loud 'hurrah,' which flew on the wings of the wind over housetops. So queer and sound is English feeling, that now Major Hockin became in truth what hitherto he was in title only—the lord and master of Bruntsea.

'A boat! a boat!' he called out again. 'We know not who are drowning. The bank still breaks the waves; a stout boat surely could live inside it.'

'Yes, a boat could live well enough in this cockle, though never among them breakers,' old Barnes the fisherman answered, who used to take us out for whiting; 'but Lord bless your honour, all the boats are thumped to pieces, except yonner one, and who can get at her?'

Before restoring his hands to their proper dwelling-place—his pockets—he jerked his thumb towards a long white boat, which we had not seen through the blinding scud. Bereft of its brethren, or sisters—for all fluctuating things are feminine—that boat survived, in virtue of

standing a few feet higher than the rest. But even so, and mounted on the last hump of the pebble-ridge, it was rolling and reeling with stress of the wind and the wash of wild water under it.

'How nobly our Lyceum stands!' the Major shouted, for anything less than a shout was dumb; 'this is the time to try institutions. I am proud of my foundations.'

In answer to his words, appeared a huge brown surge, a mountain-ridge, seething backward at the crest with the spread and weight of onset. This great wave smote all other waves away, or else embodied them, and gathered its height against the poor worn pebble-bank, and descended. A roar distinct above the universal roar proclaimed it, a crash of conflict shook the earth, and the shattered bank was swallowed in a world of leaping whiteness. When this wild mass dashed onward into the swelling flood before us, there was no sign of Lyceum left, but stubs of foundation, and a mangled roof rolling over and over, like a hen-coop.

'Well, that beats everything I ever saw,' exclaimed the gallant Major. 'What noble timber! What mortice-work! No London scamping there, my lads. But what comes here? Why the very thing we wanted! Barnes, look alive, my man. Run to your house, and get a pair of oars, and a bucket.'

It was the boat, the last surviving boat of all that hailed from Bruntsea. That monstrous billow had tossed it up like a schoolboy's kite, and dropped it whole, with an upright keel, in the inland sea, though nearly half-full of water. Driven on by wind and wave, it laboured heavily towards us; and more than once it seemed certain to sink, as it broached to, and shipped seas again. But half a dozen bold fishermen rushed with a rope into the short angry surf—to which the polled shingle-bank still acted as a powerful breakwater, else all Bruntsea had collapsed—and they hauled up the boat with a hearty cheer, and ran her up straight with 'yo—heave—oh,' and turned her on her side to drain, and then launched her again with a bucket and a man to bail out the rest of the

water, and a pair of heavy oars brought down by Barnes, and nobody knows what other things.

'Nought to steer with. Rudder gone!' cried one of the men, as the furious gale drove the boat, athwart the street, back again.

'Wants another oar,' said Barnes. 'What a fool I were to bring only two!'

'Here you are,' shouted Major Hockin; 'one of you help me to pull up this pole.'

Through a shattered gate they waded into a little garden, which had been the pride of the season at Bruntsea; and there from the ground they tore up a pole with a board at the top nailed across it, and the following not rare legend—'Lodgings to let. Inquire within. First floor front, and back parlours.'

'Fust-rate thing to steer with! Would never have believed you had the sense!' So shouted Barnes, a rough man, roughened by the stress of storm and fright. 'Get into starn-sheets if so liketh. Ye know ye may be useful.'

'I defy you to push off without my sanc-

tion. Useful, indeed! I am the captain of this boat. All the ground under it is mine. Did you think, you set of salted radicals, that I meant to let you go without me? And all among my own houses!'

'Look sharp, governor, if you has the pluck, then. Mind, we are more like to be swamped than not.'

As the boat swung about, Major Hockin jumped in, and so, on the spur of the moment, did I. We staggered all about with the heave and roll, and both would have fallen on the planks, or out over, if we had not tumbled, with opposite impetus, into the arms of each other. Then a great wave burst and soaked us both, and we fell into sitting on a slippery seat.

Meanwhile two men were tugging at each oar, and Barnes himself steering with the sign-board; and the head of the boat was kept against the wind and the billows from our breakwater. Some of these seemed resolved (though shorn of depth and height in crossing) to rush all over us and drown us in the washer-

women's drying-ground. By skill and presence of mind our captain, Barnes, foiled all their violence, till we got a little shelter from the ruins of the 'Young Men's Christian Institute.'

'Hold all,' cried Barnes; 'only keep her head up, while I look about what there is to do.'

The sight was a thing to remember; and being on the better side now of the scud, because it was flying away from us, we could make out a great deal more of the trouble which had befallen Bruntsea. The stormy fiord which had usurped the ancient track of the river was about a furlong in width, and troughed with white waves vaulting over. And the sea rushed through at the bottom as well, through scores of yards of pebbles, as it did in quiet weather even, when the tide was brimming. We in the tossing boat, with her head to the inrush of the outer sea, were just like people sitting upon the floats or rafts of a furious weir; and if any such surge had topped the ridge as the one which flung our boat to us, there could be no doubt that we must go down

as badly as the Major's houses. However, we hoped for the best, and gazed at the desolation inland.

Not only the Major's great plan, but all the lower line of old Bruntsea, was knocked to pieces, and lost to knowledge in freaks of wind-lashed waters. Men and women were running about with favourite bits of furniture, or feather-beds, or babies' cradles, or whatever they had caught hold of. The butt-ends of the three old streets that led down towards the sea-ground were dipped, as if playing see-saw in the surf, and the storm made gangways of them and light-houses of the lamp-posts. The old public-house at the corner was down, and the waves leaping in at the post-office door, and wrecking the globes of the chemist.

'Drift and dash, and roar and rush, and the devil let loose in the thick of it. My eyes are worn out with it. Take the glass, Erema, and tell us who is next to be washed away. A new set of clothes-props for Mrs. Mangles I paid for the very day I came back from town.'

With these words, the lord of the submarine manor (whose strength of spirit amazed me) offered his pet binocular, which he never went without on his own domain. And fisherman Barnes, as we rose and fell, once more saved us from being 'swamped' by his clever way of paddling through a scollop in the stern with the board about the first floor front to let.

The seamen, just keeping way on the boat, sheltered their eyes with their left hands, and fixed them on the tumultuous scene.

I also gazed through the double glass which was a very clear one; but none of us saw any human being at present in any peril.

'Old pilot was right, after all,' said one; 'but what a good job as it come o' middle day, and best of all of a Sunday!'

'I have heered say,' replied another, 'that the like thing come to pass nigh upon three hunder years agone. How did you get your things out, Jem Bishop?'

Jem, the only one of them whose house was in the havoc, regarded with a sailor's calmness the entry of the sea through his bedroom

window, and was going to favour us with a narrative, when one of his mates exclaimed—

'What do I see yonner, lads? Away beyond town altogether. Seemeth to me like a fellow swimming. Miss, will you lend me spy-glass? Never seed a double-barrelled one before. Can use him with one eye shut, I s'pose?'

'No good that way, Joe,' cried Barnes, with a wink of superior knowledge, for he often had used this 'binocular'; 'shut one eye for one barrel—stands to reason, then, you must shut both for two, my son.'

'Stow that,' said the quick-eyed sailor, as he brought the glass to bear in a moment. 'It is a man in the water, lads, and swimming to save the witch, I do believe.'

'Bless me!' cried the Major; 'how stupid of us! I never thought once of that poor woman. She must be washed out long ago. Pull for your lives, my friends. A guinea apiece if you save her.'

'And another from me,' I cried. Whereupon the boat swept round, and the tough ash

bent, and we rushed into no small danger. For nearly half a mile had we to pass of raging and boisterous water, almost as wild as the open sea itself, at the breaches of the pebble-ridge. And the risk of a heavy sea boarding us was fearfully multiplied by having thus to cross the storm, instead of breasting it. Useless and helpless, and only in the way, and battered about by wind and sea, so that my Sunday dress was become a drag, what folly, what fatuity, what frenzy I might call it, could ever have led me to jump into that boat? 'I don't know; I only know that I always do it,' said my sensible self to its mad sister, as they both shut their eyes at a great white wave. 'If I possibly survive, I will try to know better. But ever from my childhood I am getting into scrapes.'

The boat laboured on, with a good many grunts, but not a word from any one. More than once we were obliged to fetch up, as a great billow topped the poor shingle-bank; and we took so much water on board that the men said afterwards that I saved them. I only re-

member sitting down, and working at the bucket with both hands, till much of the skin was gone, and my arms and many other places ached. But what was that, to be compared with drowning?

At length we were opposite 'Desolate Hole,' which was a hole no longer, but filled and flooded with the churning whirl and reckless dominance of water. Tufts and tussocks of shattered brush and rolling wreck played around it, and the old gray stone of mullioned windows split the wash like mooring-posts. We passed and gazed; but the only sound was the whistling of the tempest, and the only living sight a sea-gull, weary of his wings, and drowning.

'No living creature can be there,' the Major broke our long silence; 'land, my friends, if land we may. We risk our own lives for nothing.'

The men lay back on their oars, to fetch the gallant boat to the wind again, when through a great gap in the ruins they saw a sight that startled manhood. At the back of that ruin, on the landward side, on a wall which tottered

under them, there were two figures standing. One a tall man, urging on the other, a woman shrinking. At a glance, or with a thought, I knew them both. One was Lord Castlewood's first love; the other his son and murderer.

Our men shouted with the whole power of their hearts to tell that miserable pair to wait till succour should be brought to them. And the Major stood up and waved his hat, and in doing so tumbled back again. I cannot tell—how could I tell in the thick of it?—but an idea or a flit of fancy touched me (and afterwards became conviction) that while the man heard us not at all, and had no knowledge of us, his mother turned round, and saw us all, and faced the storm in preference.

Whatever the cause may have been, at least she suddenly changed her attitude. The man had been pointing to the roof, which threatened to fall in a mass upon them; while she had been shuddering back from the depth of eddying waves below her. But now she drew up her poor bent figure, and leaned on her son to obey him.

Our boat, with strong arms labouring for life, swept round the old gable of the ruin; but we were compelled to 'give it wide berth,' as Captain Barnes shouted; and then a black squall of terrific wind and hail burst forth. We bowed our heads, and drew our bodies to their tightest compass, and every rib of our boat vibrated as a violin does; and the oars were beaten flat, and dashed their drip into fringes like a small-toothed comb.

That great squall was either a whirlwind or the crowning blast of a hurricane. It beat the high waves hollow, as if it fell from the sky upon them; and it snapped off one of our oars at the hilt, so that two of our men rolled backward. And when we were able to look about again, the whole roof of 'Desolate Hole' was gone, and little of the walls left standing. And how we should guide our course, or even save our lives, we knew not.

We were compelled to bring up—as best we might—with the boat's head to the sea, and so to keep it, by using the steering gear against the surviving oar. As for the people we were

come to save, there was no chance whatever of approaching them. Even without the mishap to the oar, we never could have reached them.

And indeed when first we saw them again, they seemed better off than ourselves were. For they were not far from dry land, and the man (a skilful and powerful swimmer) had a short piece of plank, which he knew how to use, to support his weak companion.

'Brave fellow! Fine fellow!' the Major cried, little knowing whom he was admiring. 'See how he keeps up his presence of mind! Such a man as that is worth anything. And he cares more for her than he does for himself. He shall have the Society's medal. One more long and strong stroke, my noble friend. Oh, great God! what has befallen him?'

In horror and pity we gazed. The man had been dashed against something headlong. He whirled round and round in white water, his legs were thrown up, and we saw no more of him. The woman cast off the plank, and tossed her helpless arms in search of him. A shriek, ringing far on the billowy shore, declared

that she had lost him; and then, without a struggle, she clasped her hands, and the merciless water swallowed her.

'It is all over,' cried Major Hockin, lifting his drenched hat solemnly. 'The Lord knoweth best. He has taken them home.'

CHAPTER LV.

A DEAD LETTER.

With that great tornado the wind took a leap of more points of the compass than I can tell. Barnes, the fisherman, said how many; but I might be quite wrong in repeating it. One thing, at any rate, was within my compass—it had been blowing to the top of its capacity, direct from the sea; but now it began to blow quite as hard along the shore. This rough ingratitude of wind to waves, which had followed each breath of its orders, produced extraordinary passion, and raked them into pointed wind-cocks.

'Captain, we can't live this out,' cried Barnes; 'we must run her ashore at once; tide has turned; we might be blown out to sea, with one oar, and then the Lord himself couldn't save us.'

Crippled as we were, we contrived to get into a creek, or back-water, near the Major's gate. Here the men ran the boat up, and we all climbed out, stiff, battered, and terrified, but doing our best to be most truly thankful.

'Go home, Captain, as fast as you can, and take the young lady along of you,' said Mr. Barnes, as we stood and gazed at the weltering breadth of disaster; 'we are born to the drip; but not you, Sir; and you are not so young as you was, you know.'

'I am younger than ever I was,' the lord of the manor answered, sternly, yet glancing back, to make sure of no interruption from his better half—who had not even heard of his danger—'none of that nonsense to me, Barnes! You know your position, and I know mine. On board of that boat you took the lead, and that may have misled you. I am very much obliged to you, I am sure, for all your skill and courage, which have saved the lives of all of us. But on land you will just obey me.'

'Sartinly, Captain. What's your orders?'

'Nothing at all. I give no orders. I only

make suggestions. But if your experience sees a way to recover those two poor bodies, let us try it at once—at once, Barnes. Erema, run home. This is no scene for you. And tell Margaret to put on the double-bottomed boiler, with the stock she make on Friday, and a peck of patent peas. There is nothing to beat pea-soup; and truly one never knows what may happen.'

This was only too evident now, and nobody disobeyed him.

Running up his 'drive' to deliver that message, at one of the many bends I saw people from Bruntsea hurrying along a footpath through the dairy-farm. While the flood continued, this was their only way to meet the boat's crew. On the steps of 'Smuggler's Castle' (as Bruntlands House was still called by the wicked) I turned again, and the new sea-line was fringed with active searchers. I knew what they were looking for; but scared and drenched, and shivering as I was, no more would I go near them. My duty was rather to go in and comfort dear Aunt Mary and myself.

In that melancholy quest I could do no good, but a great deal of harm, perhaps, if anything was found, by breaking forth about it.

Mrs. Hockin had not the least idea of the danger we had encountered. Bailiff Hopkins had sent her home, in Rasper's fly, by an inland road, and she kept a good scolding quite ready for her husband, to distract his mind from disaster. That trouble had happened, she could not look out of her window without knowing; but could it be right, at their time of life, to stand in the wet so, and challenge Providence, and spoil the first turkey-poult of the season?

But when she heard of her husband's peril, in the midst of all his losses, his self-command, and noble impulse first of all to rescue life, she burst into tears, and hugged and kissed me, and said the same thing nearly fifty times.

'Just like him. Just like my Nicholas. You thought him a speculative, selfish man. Now you see your mistake, Erema.'

When her veteran husband came home at last (thoroughly jaded, and bringing his fisher-

men to gulp the pea-soup and to gollop the turkey), a small share of mind, but a large one of heart, is required to imagine her doings. Enough that the Major kept saying 'Pooh-pooh!' and the more he said the less he got of it.

When feelings calmed down, and we returned to facts, our host and hero—who in plain truth had not so wholly eclipsed me in courage, though of course I expected no praise, and got none, for people hate courage in a lady—to put it more simply, the Major himself, making a considerable fuss, as usual—for to my mind he never could be Uncle Sam—produced from the case of his little 'Church Service,' to which he had stuck like a Briton, a sealed and stamped letter, addressed to me at Castlewood, in Berkshire, 'stamped' not with any post-office tool, but merely with the red thing which pays the English post.

Sodden and blurred as the writing was, I knew the clear, firm hand, the same which on the envelope at Shoxford had tempted me to meanness. This letter was from Thomas Hoyle; the Major had taken it from the pocket of his

corpse; all doubt about his death was gone. When he felt his feet on the very shore, and turned to support his mother, a violent wave struck the back of his head upon Major Hockin's pillar-box.

Such sadness came into my heart—though sternly it should have been gladness—that I begged their pardon, and went away, as if with a private message. And wicked as it may have been, to read was more than once to cry. The letter began abruptly:

'You know nearly all my story now. I have only to tell you what brought me to you, and what my present offer is. But to make it clear, I must enlarge a little.

'There was no compact of any kind between your father and myself. He forbore at first to tell what he must have known, partly perhaps to secure my escape, and partly for other reasons. If he had been brought to trial, his duty to his family and himself would have led him, no doubt, to explain things. And if that had failed, I would have returned and surrendered myself. As things happened, there was no need.

'Through bad luck, with which I had nothing to do, though doubtless the whole has been piled on my head, your father's home was destroyed, and he seems to have lost all care for everything. Yet how much better off was he than I! Upon me the curse fell at birth; upon him, after thirty years of ease and happiness. However, for that very reason, perhaps, he bore it worse than I did. He grew embittered against the world, which had in no way ill-treated him; whereas its very first principle is to scorn all such as I am. He seems to have become a misanthrope, and a fatalist like myself. Though it might almost make one believe the existence of such a thing as justice, to see pride pay for its wickedness thus—the injury to the outcast son recoil upon the pampered one, and the family arrogance crown itself with the ignominy of the family.

'In any case there was no necessity for my interference; and being denied by fate all sense of duty to a father, I was naturally driven to double my duty to my mother, whose life was left hanging upon mine. So we two for many

years wandered about, shunning islands and insular prejudice. I also shunned your father, though (so far as I know) he neither sought me nor took any trouble to clear himself. If the one child now left to him had been a son, heir to the family property and so on, he might have behaved quite otherwise, and he would have been bound to do so. But having only a female child, who might never grow up, and, if she did, was very unlikely to succeed, he must have resolved at least to wait. And perhaps he confirmed himself with the reflection that even if people believed his tale (so long after date, and so unvouched), so far as family annals were concerned, the remedy would be as bad as the disease. Moreover, he owed his life to me, at great risk of my own; and to pay such a debt with the hangman's rope would scarcely appear quite honourable, even in the best society.

'It is not for me to pretend to give his motives, although from my knowledge of his character I can guess them pretty well perhaps. We went our several ways in the world, neither of us very fortunate.

'One summer, in the Black Forest, I fell in with an outcast Englishman, almost as great a vagabond as myself. He was under the ban of the law for writing his father's name without license. He did not tell me that, or perhaps even I might have despised him, for I never was dishonest. But one great bond there was between us—we both detested laws and men. My intimacy with him is the one thing in life which I am ashamed of. He passed by a false name then, of course. But his true name was Montague Hockin. My mother was in very weak health then, and her mind for the most part clouded; and I need not say that she knew nothing of what I had done for her sake. That man pretended to take the greatest interest in her condition, and to know a doctor at Baden who could cure her.

'We avoided all cities (as he knew well) and lived in simple villages, subsisting partly upon my work, and partly upon the little income left by my grandfather, Thomas Hoyle. But compared with Hockin we were well off; and he did his best to swindle us. Luckily all my

faith in mankind was confined to the feminine gender, and not much even of that survived. In a very little time I saw that people may repudiate law as well from being below as from being above it.

'Then he came one night, with the finest style and noblest contempt of everything. We must prepare ourselves for great news, and all our kindness to him would be repaid tenfold in a week or two. Let me go into Freyburg that time to-morrow night, and listen! I asked him nothing as to what he meant, for I was beginning to weary of him, as of everybody. However, I thought it just worth while, having some one who bought my wicker-work, to enter the outskirts of the town on the following evening, and wait to be told if any news was stirring. And the people were amazed at my not knowing that last night the wife of an English lord—for so they called him, though no lord yet—had run away with a golden-bearded man, believed to be also English.

'About that you know more perhaps than I do. But I wish you to know what that

Hockin was, and to clear myself of complicity. Of Herbert Castlewood I knew nothing, and I never even saw the lady. And to say (as Sir Montague Hockin has said) that I plotted all that wickedness from spite towards all of the Castlewood name, is to tell as foul a lie as even he can well indulge in.

'It need not be said that he does not know my story from any word of mine. To such a fellow I was not likely to commit my mother's fate. But he seems to have guessed at once that there was something strange in my history; and then, after spying and low prying at my mother, to have shaped his own conclusion. Then having entirely under his power that young fool who left a kind husband for him, he conceived a most audacious scheme. This was no less than to rob your cousin, the last Lord Castlewood—not of his wife, and jewels, and ready money only—but also of all the disposable portion of the Castlewood estates. For the lady's mother had taken good care, like a true Hungarian, to have all the lands settled

upon her daughter, so far as the husband could deal with them. And though, at the date of the marriage, he could not really deal at all with them—your father being still alive—it appears that his succession (when it afterwards took place) was bound, at any rate, as against himself. A divorce might have cancelled this—I cannot say—but your late cousin was the last man in the world to incur the needful exposure. Upon this they naturally counted.

'The new "Lady Hockin" (as she called herself, with as much right as "Lady Castlewood") flirted about, while her beauty lasted; but even then found her master in a man of deeper wickedness. But if her poor husband desired revenge—which he does not seem to have done perhaps—he could not have had it better. She was seized with a loathsome disease, which devoured her beauty, like Herod and his glory. I believe that she still lives, but no one can go near her; least of all, the fastidious Montague.'

At this part of the letter I drew a deep

breath, and exclaimed 'Thank God!' I know not how many times; and perhaps it was a crime of me to do it even once.

'Finding his nice prospective game destroyed by this little accident—for he meant to have married the lady after her husband's death, and set you at defiance; but even he could not do that now, little as he cares for opinion—what did he do but shift hands altogether. He made up his mind to confer the honour of his hand on you, having seen you somewhere in London, and his tactics became the very opposite of what they had been hitherto. Your father's innocence now must be maintained instead of his guiltiness.

'With this in view, he was fool enough to set the detective police after me—me, who could snap all their noses off! For he saw how your heart was all set on one thing, and expected to have you his serf for ever, by the simple expedient of hanging me. The detectives failed, as they always do. He also failed in his overtures to you.

'You did your utmost against me also; for

which I bear you no ill-will, but rather admire your courage. You acted in a straightforward way, and employed no dirty agency. Of your simple devices I had no fear. However, I thought it as well to keep an eye upon that Hockin, and a worthy old fool, some relation of his, who had brought you back from America. To this end, I kept my headquarters near him, and established my mother comfortably. She was ordered sea-air, and has had enough. To-morrow I shall remove her. By the time you receive this letter, we shall both be far away, and come back no more ; but first I shall punish that Hockin. Without personal violence this will be done.

'Now what I propose to you is simple, moderate, and most strictly just. My mother's little residue of life must pass in ease and comfort. She has wronged no one, but ever been wronged. Allow her 300*l.* a year, to be paid as I shall direct you. For myself I will not take a farthing. You will also restore, as I shall direct, the trinket upon which she sets great value, and for which I sought vainly when

we came back to England. I happen to know that you have it now.

'In return for these just acts, you have the right to set forth the whole truth publicly, to proclaim your father's innocence, and (as people will say) his chivalry; and which will perhaps rejoice you also, to hear no more of

'THOMAS HOYLE.

'P.S.—Of course I am trusting your honour in this. But your father's daughter can be no sneak; as indeed I have already proved.'

CHAPTER LVI.

WITH HIS OWN SWORD.

'WHAT a most wonderful letter!' cried the Major, when, after several careful perusals, I thought it my duty to show it to him. 'He calls me a "worthy old fool," does he? Well, I call him something a great deal worse—an unworthy skulk, a lunatic, a subverter of rank, and a Radical! And because he was a bastard, is the whole world base? And to come and live like that, in a house of mine, and pay me no rent, and never even let me see him! Your grandfather was quite right, my dear, in giving him the cold shoulder. Of course you won't pay him a farthing.'

'You forget that he is dead,' I answered; 'and his poor mother with him. At least he behaved well to his mother. You called him a hero- when you knew not who he was. Poor

fellow, he is dead! And in spite of all, I cannot help being very sorry for him.'

'Yes, I dare say. Women always are. But you must show a little common sense, Erema. Your grandfather seems to have had too much, and your father far too little. We must keep this matter quiet. Neither the man nor the woman must we know, or a nice stir we shall have in all the county papers. There must be an inquest, of course, upon them both; but none of the fellows read this direction, for the admirable reason that they cannot read. Our coming forward could do no good, and just now Bruntsea has other things to think of; and first and foremost, my ruin, as they say.'

'Please not to talk of that,' I exclaimed. 'I can raise any quantity of money now, and you shall have it without paying interest. You wanted the course of the river restored, and now you have more—you have got the very sea. You could float the "Bridal Veil" itself, I do believe, at Bruntsea.'

'You have suggested a fine idea,' the Major exclaimed with emphasis. 'You certainly should

have been an engineer. It is a thousand times easier—as everybody knows—to keep water in than to keep it out. Having burst my barricade, the sea shall stop inside and pay for it. Far less capital will be required. By Jove, what a fool I must have been not to see the hand of Providence in all this! Mary, can you spare me a minute, my dear? The noblest idea has occurred to me. Well, never mind, if you are busy; perhaps I had better not state it crudely, though it is not true that it happens every hour. I shall turn it over in my mind throughout the evening service. I mean to be there, just to let them see. They think that I am crushed, of course. They will see their mistake; and, Erema, you may come. The gale is over, and the evening bright. You sit by the fire, Mary, my dear; I shall not let you out again; keep the silver kettle boiling. In church I always think more clearly than where people talk so much. But when I come home I require something. I see, I see. Instead of an idle, fashionable lounging-place for nincompoops from London, instead of flirtation and novel-

reading, vulgarity, show, and indecent attire, and positively immoral bathing, we will now have industry, commerce, wealth, triumph of mechanism, lofty enterprise, and international goodwill. A harbour has been the great want of this coast; see what a thing it is at Newport! We will now have a harbour and floating docks, without any muddy, malarious river—all blue water from the sea; and our fine cliff-range shall be studded with good houses. And the whole shall be called "Erema-port." '

Well, Erema must be getting very near her port, although it was not at Bruntsea. Enough for this excellent man, and that still more excellent woman, that there they are, as busy and as happy as the day is long—which imposes some limit upon happiness, perhaps, inasmuch as to the busy every day is short. But Mrs. Hockin, though as full of fowls as ever, gets no White Sultans, nor any other rarity now from Sir Montague Hockin. That gentleman still is alive—so far at least as we have heard of; but no people owning any self-respect ever deal with him, to their knowledge. He gambled

away all his father's estates, and the Major bought the last of them for his youngest son, a very noble Captain Hockin (according to his mother's judgment), whom I never had the honour of seeing. Sir Montague lives in a sad plight somewhere, and his cousin still hopes that he may turn honest.

But as to myself and far greater persons, still there are a few words to be said. As soon as all necessary things were done at Bruntsea and at Castlewood, and my father's memory cleared from all stain, and by simple truth ennobled, in a manner strictly legal and consistent with heavy expenses, myself having made a long deposition and received congratulations—as soon as it was possible, I left them all, and set sail for America.

The rashness of such a plan it is more easy for one to establish than two to deny. But what was there in it of peril or of enterprise compared with what I had been through already? I could not keep myself now from going, and reasoned but little about it.

Meanwhile there had been no further tidings

of Colonel Gundry or Firm, or even Martin of the Mill himself. But one thing I did which showed some little foresight. As soon as my mind was made up, and long before ever I could get away, I wrote to Martin Clogfast telling him of my intention, and begging him, if he had any idea of the armies, or the Sawyer, or even Firm, or anything whatever of interest, to write (without losing a day) to me, directing his letter to a house in New York, whose address Major Hockin gave me.

So many things had to be done, and I listened so foolishly to the Major (who did his very best to stop me) that it came to be May, 1862 (nearly four years after my father's death), before I could settle all my plans and start. For everybody said that I was much too young to take such a journey all by myself, and 'what everybody says must be right,' whenever there is no exception to prove the rule. 'Aunt Marys' are not to be found every day, nor even Major Hockins; and this again helped to throw me back in getting away from England. And but for his vast engineering ideas, and another

slight touch of rheumatic gout (brought upon herself by Mrs. Hockin through setting seven hens in one evening), the Major himself might have come with me, 'to observe the new military tactics,' as well as to look for his cousin Sampson.

In recounting this, I seem to be as long as the thing itself was in accomplishing. But at last it was done, and most kindly was I offered the very thing to suit me—permission to join the party of a well-known British officer, Colonel Cheriton, of the Engineers. This gentleman, being of the highest repute as a writer upon military subjects, had leave from the Federal Government to observe the course of this tremendous war. And perhaps he will publish some day what seems as yet to be wholly wanting—a calm and impartial narrative of that unparalleled conflict. At any rate, he meant to spare no trouble in a matter so instructive, and he took his wife and two daughters —very nice girls who did me a world of good —to establish them in Washington, or wherever the case might require.

Lucky as this was for me, I could not leave my dear and faithful friends without deep sorrow; but we all agreed that it should be only for a very little time. We landed first at New York, and there I found two letters from Martin of the Mill. In the first he grumbled much, and told me that nothing was yet known about Uncle Sam; in the second he grumbled (if possible) more, but gave me some important news. To wit, he had received a few lines from the Sawyer, who had failed as yet to find his grandson, and sadly lamented the misery he saw, and the shocking destruction of God's good works. He said that he could not bring himself to fight (even if he were young enough) against his own dear countrymen, one of whom was his own grandson; at the same time he felt that they must be put down, for trying to have things too much their own way. About slavery, he had seen too much of niggers to take them at all for his equals, and no white man with any self-respect would desire to be their brother. The children of Ham were put down at the bottom, as their noses and their

lips pronounced, according to divine revelation, and for sons of Japhet to break up the noblest nation in the world, on their account, was like rushing in to inherit their curse. As sure as his name was Sampson Gundry, those who had done it would get the worst, though as yet they were doing wonders. And there could be no doubt about one thing—which party it was that began it. But come what would of it, here he was; and never would Saw-mills see him again, unless he brought Firm Gundry. But he wanted news of poor Miss 'Rema; and if any came to the house, they must please to send it to the care of Colonel Baker, head-quarters of the army of the Potomac.

This was the very thing I wished to know, and I saw now how stupid I must have been not to have thought of it long ago. For Colonel Baker was, to my knowledge, an ancient friend of Uncle Sam, and had joined the national army at the very outbreak of the war. Well-known, not only in California but throughout the States, for gallantry and conduct, this officer had been a great accession to the Federal

cause, when so many wavered, and so he was appointed to a good command. But, alas, when I told Colonel Cheriton my news, I learned from him (who had carefully watched all the incidents of the struggle) that Uncle Sam's noble friend had fallen in the Battle of Ball's Bluff, while charging at the head of his regiment.

Still there was hope that some of the officers might know where to find Uncle Sam, who was not at all a man to be mislaid; and being allowed to accompany my English friends, I went on to Washington. We found that city in a highly nervous state, and from time to time ready to be captured. General Jackson was almost at the gates, and the President every day was calling out for men. The army of Virginia had been beaten back to entrenchments before the capital, and General Lee was invading Maryland. Battle followed battle, thick as blows upon a threshing floor, and though we were always said to be victorious, the enemy seemed none the more to run away. In this confusion, what chance had I of discovering even the Sawyer?

Colonel Cheriton (who must have found me a dreadful thorn in the flank of his strategy) missed no opportunity of inquiry, as he went from one valley to another. For the war seemed to run along the course of rivers, though it also passed through the forests and lakes, and went up into the mountains. Our wonderfully clever and kind member of the British army was delighted with the movements of General Lee, who alone showed scientific elegance in slaying his fellow-countrymen ; and the worst of it was that instead of going after my dear Uncle Sam, Colonel Cheriton was always rushing about with maps, plans, and telescopes, to follow the tracery of Lee's campaign. To treat of such matters is far beyond me, as I am most thankful to confess. Neither will I dare to be sorry for a great man doing what became his duty. My only complaint against him is that he kept us in a continual fright.

However, this went by, and so did many other things, though heavily laden with grief and death ; and the one thing we learned was

to disbelieve ninety-nine out of every hundred. Letters for the Sawyer were despatched by me to every likely place for him, and advertisements put into countless newspapers, but none of them seemed to go near him. Old as he was, he avoided feather-beds, and roamed like a true Californian. But at last I found him, in a sad, sad way.

It was after the battle of Chancellorsville, and our army had been driven back across the Rappahanock. 'Our army,' I call it, because (although we belonged to neither party) fortune had brought us into contact with these; and knowing more about them, we were bound to take their side. And not only that, but to me it appeared altogether beyond controversy, that a man of large mind and long experience (such as Uncle Sam had) should know much better than his grandson which cause was the one to fight for. At the same time Firm was not at all to be condemned. And if it was true, as Martin Clogfast said, that trouble of mind at my absence had driven him into a prejudiced view, nothing could possibly be more ungra-

cious than for me to make light of his judgment.

Being twenty years old by this time, I was wiser than I used to be, and now made a practice of thinking twice before rushing into peril, as I used to do in California, and to some extent also in England. For though my adventures might not have been as strange as many I myself have heard of (especially from Suan Isco), nevertheless they had comprised enough of teaching and suffering also, to make me careful about having any more. And so, for a long time, I kept at the furthest distance possible, in such a war, from the vexing of the air with cannons, till even Colonel Cheriton's daughters, perfectly soft and peaceful girls, began to despise me as a coward! Knowing what I had been through, I indulged their young opinions.

Therefore they were the more startled when I set forth under a sudden impulse, or perhaps impatience, for a town very near the headquarters of the defeated General Hooker. As they were so brave, I asked them whether they

would come with me; but although their father was known to be there, they turned pale at the thought of it. This pleased me, and made me more resolute to go; and in three days' time I was at Falmouth, a town on our side of the Rappahanock.

Here I saw most miserable sights that made me ashamed of all trifling fear. When hundreds and thousands of gallant men were dying in crippled agony, who or what was I to make any fuss about my paltry self? Clumsy as I was, some kind and noble ladies taught me how to give help among the sufferers.

At first I cried so at everybody's pain, while asking why ever they should have it, that I did some good by putting them up to bear it rather than distress me so. And when I began to command myself (as custom soon enabled me), I did some little good again by showing them how I cared for them. Their poor weak eyes, perhaps never expecting to see a nice thing in the world again, used to follow me about with a faint, slow roll, and a feeble spark of jealousy.

That I should have had such a chance of doing good, onefold to others and a thousandfold to self, at this turn of life, when I was full of little me, is another of the many most clear indications of a kind hand over me. Every day there was better than a year of ordinary life, in breaking the mind from its little selfish turns, and opening the heart to a larger power. And all this discipline was needed.

For one afternoon when we all were tired, with great heat upon us suddenly, and the flies beginning to be dreadful, our chief being rather unwell and fast asleep, the surgeons away, and our beds as full as they could be, I was called down to reason with an applicant who would take no denial. 'A rough man, a very rough old man, and in a most terrible state of mind,' said the girl who brought the message; 'and room he would have, or he would know the reason.'

'The reason is not far to seek,' I answered, more to myself than her, as I ran down the stairs to discomfit that old man. At the open door, with the hot wind tossing worn white

curls, and parching shrivelled cheeks, now wearily raising his battered hat, stood my dear Uncle Sam, the Sawyer.

'Lor' a massy, young lady, be you altogether daft? In my best of days, never was I lips for kissing. And the bootifullest creatur—come now, I ain't saved your life, have I now?'

'Yes, fifty times over. Fifty thousand times. Uncle Sam, don't you know Erema?'

'My eyes be dashed! And dashed they be, to forget the look of yours, my dearie. Seven days have I marched, without thanking the Lord; and hot coals of fire has He poured upon me now, for His mercy endureth for ever. To think of you—to think of you—as like my own child as could be—only of more finer breed—here standing in front of me, like this here! There, I never dreamed to do that again, and would scorn a young man at the sight of it.'

The Sawyer was too honest to conceal that he was weeping. He simply turned his tanned and weathered face towards the door-post, not to hide his tears, but reconcile his pride by

feigning it. I felt that he must be at very low ebb, and all that I had seen of other people's sorrow had no power to assuage me. Inside the door, to keep the hot wind out and hide my eyes from the old man's face, I had some little quiet sobs, until we could both express ourselves.

'It is poor Firm, the poor, poor lad—oh, what hath happened him? That I should see the day!'

Uncle Sam's deep voice broke into a moan, and he bowed his rough forehead on his arm, and shook. Then I took him by the sleeve and brought him in.

'Not dead—poor Firm, your only one—not dead?' as soon as words would come, I asked, and trembled for the opening of his lips.

'Not dead—not quite; but ten times worse. He hath flown into the face of the Lord, like Saul and his armour-bearer. He hath fallen on his own sword; and the worst of it is that the darned thing won't come out again.'

'Firm, the last person in the world to do it! Oh, Uncle Sam, surely they have told you——'

'No lies, no lie at all, my dear. And not only that, but he wanteth now to die—and won't be long first, I reckon. But no time to lose, my dear. The Lord hath sent you to make him happy in his leaving of the world. Can 'e raise a bed and a doctor here? If he would but groan I could bear it a bit, instead of bleeding inward. And for sartin sure, a' would groan nicely, if only by force of habit, at first sight of a real doctor.'

'There are half-a-dozen here,' I said; 'or at least close by. He shall have my own bed. But where is he?'

'We have laid 'un in the sand,' he answered simply, 'for to dry his perspiration. That weak the poor chap is that he streameth night and day, Miss. Never would you know him for our Firm now, any more than me for Sampson Gundry. Ah me, but the Lord is hard on us!'

Slowly and heavily he went his way to fetch

poor Firm to the hospital; while, with light feet but a heavy heart, I returned to arouse our managers. Speedily and well were all things done; and in half an hour Firm lay upon my bed, with two of the cleverest surgeons of New York most carefully examining his wasted frame. These whispered and shook their heads, as in such a case was indispensable; and listening eagerly, I heard the senior surgeon say—'No, he could never bear it.' The younger man seemed to think otherwise, but to give way to the longer experience. Then dear Uncle Sam, having bought a new hat at the corner of the street, came forward. Knowing too well what excitement is, and how it changes every one, I lifted my hand for him to go back; but he only put his great hot web of fingers into mine, and drew me to him softly, and covered me up with his side. 'He heareth nort, nort, nort,' he whispered to me; and then spoke aloud.

'Gentlemen and ladies, or ladies and gentlemen, is the more correct form now-a-days, have I leave to say a word or two? Then if I

have, as your manner to me showeth, and heartily thanking you for that same, my words shall go into an acorn-cup. This lad, laid out at your mercy here, was as fine a young fellow as the West hath ever raised; straight and nimble, and could tell no lie. Family reasons, as you will excoose of, drew him to the arms of rebellion. I may have done, and overdone it myself, in arguing cantrips, and convictions, whereof to my knowledge good never came yet. At any rate, off he went anyhow; and the force of nature drew me after him. No matter that to you, I dare say; but it would be if you was in it.

'Ladies and gentlemen, here he is; and no harm can you make out of him. Although he hath fought for the wrong side to our thinking, bravely hath he fought, and made his way to a Colonelship, worth five thousand dollars, if ever they pay their wages. Never did I think that he would earn so much, having never owned gifts of machinery; and concerning the handling of the dollars perhaps will carry my

opinion out. But where was I wandering of a little thing like that?

'It hath pleased the Lord, who doeth all things well, when finally come to look back upon—the Lord hath seen fit to be down on this young man for going agin his grandfather. From Californy—a free state, mind you—he come away to fight for slavery. And how hath he magnified his office? By shooting the biggest man on that side, the almighty foe of the Union, the foremost captain of Midian—the General in whom they trusted. No bullets of ours could touch him; but by his own weapons he hath fallen. As soon as Ephraim Gundry heard it, he did what you see done to him.'

Uncle Sam having said his say—which must have cost him dearly—withdrew from the bed where his grandson's body lay shrunken, lax, and grimy. To be sure that it was Firm, I gave one glance—for Firm had always been straight, tall, and large—and then, in a miserable mood, I stole to the Sawyer's side, to stand with him. 'Am I to blame? Is this my fault?

For even this am I to blame?' I whispered; but he did not heed me, and his hands were like hard stone.

After a long, hot, heavy time, while I was labouring vainly, the Sawyer also (through exhaustion of excitement), weary, and afraid to begin again with new bad news, as beaten people expect to do—the younger surgeon came up to him, and said, 'Will you authorise it?'

'To cut 'un up? To show your museums what a Western lad is? Never. By the Blue River, he shall have a good grave. So help me God, to my own, my man!'

'You misunderstand me. We have more subjects now than we should want for fifty years. War knocks the whole of their value on the head. We have fifty bodies as good as his, and are simply obliged to bury them. What I mean is—shall we pull the blade out?'

'Can he do anything with that there blade in him? I have heard of a man in Kentucky once——'

'Yes, yes; we know all those stories, Colonel—suit the newspapers, not the journals.

This fellow has what must kill him inside; he is worn to a shadow already. If there it is left die he must, and quick stick; inflammation is set up already. If we extract it, his chance of surviving is scarcely one in a hundred.'

'Let him have the one then, the one in the hundred, like the ninety and nine lost sheep. The Lord can multiply a hundred fold—some threescore, and some an hundred fold. I will speak to Him, gentlemen, while you try the job.'

CHAPTER LVII.

FEMALE SUFFRAGE.

All that could be done by skill, and care, and love, was done for Firm. Our lady manager, and head-nurse, never left him when she could be spared, and all the other ladies vied in zeal for this young soldier, so that I could scarcely get near him. His grandfather's sad and extraordinary tale was confirmed by a wounded prisoner. Poor Ephraim Gundry's rare power of sight had been fatal perhaps to the cause he fought for, or at least to its greatest captain. Returning from desperate victory, the general, wrapped in the folds of night, and perhaps in the gloom of his own stern thoughts, while it seemed quite impossible that he should be seen, encountered the fire of his own troops; and the order to fire was given by his favourite officer, Colonel Firm Gundry. When the young man

learned that he had destroyed, by a lingering death, the chief idol of his heart, he called for a rifle, but all refused him, knowing too well what his purpose was. Then under the trees, without a word or sigh, he set the hilt of his sword upon the earth, and the point to his heart—as well as he could find it. The blade passed through him, and then snapped off—but I cannot bear to speak of it.

And now, few people might suppose it, but the substance of which he was made will be clear, when not only his own knowledge of his case, but also the purest scientific reasoning established a truth more frankly acknowledged in the New World than in the Old one. It was proved that, with a good constitution, it is safer to receive two wounds than one, even though they may not be at the same time taken. Firm had been shot by the captain of Mexican robbers, as long ago related. He was dreadfully pulled down at the time, and few people could have survived it. But now that stood him in the very best stead, not only as a lesson of patience, but also in the question of cartilage.

But not being certain what cartilage is, I can only refer enquirers to the note-book of the hospital, which has been printed.

For us, it was enough to know, that (shattered as he was and must be) this brave and single-minded warrior struggled for the time successfully with that great enemy of the human race, to whom the human race so largely consign one another, and themselves. But some did say, and emphatically Uncle Sam, that Colonel Firm Gundry—for a colonel he was now, not by courtesy, but commission—would never have held up his head to do it, but must have gone on with his ravings for death, if somebody had not arrived, in the nick of time, and cried over him—a female somebody from old England.

And even after that, they say, that he never would have cared to be a man again, never would have calmed his conscience with the reflection, so common-place and yet so high—that having done our best according to our lights, we must not dwell always on our darkness—if once again, and for the residue of life, there had not been some one to console him.

A consolation that need not have, and is better without, pure reason, coming, as that would come, from a quarter whence it is never quite welcome. Enough for me that he never laid hand to a weapon of war again, and never shall, unless our own home is invaded.

For after many months—each equal to a year of teaching and of humbling—there seemed to be a good time for me to get away, and attend to my duties in England. Of these I had been reminded often by letters, and once by a messenger, but all money-matters seemed dust in the balance where life and death were swinging. But now Uncle Sam and his grandson, having their love knit afresh by disaster, were eager to start for the Saw-mill, and trust all except their own business to Providence.

I had told them that, when they went westward, my time would be come for starting eastward; and being unlikely to see them again, I should hope for good news frequently. And then I got dear Uncle Sam by himself, and begged him, for the sake of Firm's happiness, to keep him as far as he could from Penn-

sylvania Sylvester. At the same time I thought that the very nice young lady, who jumped upon his nose from the window, Miss Annie —— I forgot her name, or at any rate I told him so— would make him a good straightforward wife, so far as one could tell from having seen her. And that seemed to have been settled in their infancy. And if he would let me know when it was to be, I had seen a thing in London I should like to give them.

When I asked the Sawyer to see to this, instead of being sorry, he seemed quite pleased, and nodded sagaciously, and put his hat on, as he generally did, to calculate.

'Both of them gals have married long ago,' he said, looking at me with a fine soft gaze; 'and bad handfuls their mates have got of them. But what made you talk of them, missy, or "my lady"—as now you are in old country, I hear— what made you think of them like that, my dearie?'

'I can't tell what made me think of them. How can I tell why I think of everything?'

'Still, it was an odd thing for your ladyship to say.'

'Uncle Sam, I am nobody's ladyship; least of all yours. What makes you speak so? I am your own little wandering child, whose life you saved, and whose father you loved, and who loses all who love her. Even from you, I am forced to go away. Oh, why is it always my fate—my fate?'

'Hush!' said the old man; and I stopped my outburst at his whisper. 'To talk of fate, my dearie, shows either one thing or the other—that we have no will of our own, or else that we know not how to guide it. I never knew a good man talk of fate. The heathens and the pagans made it. The Lord in heaven is enough for me; and he always hath allowed me my own free will, though I may not have handled 'un cleverly. And He giveth you your own will now, my missy—to go from us, or to stop with us. And being as you are a very grand young woman now, owning English land and income paid in gold, instead of greenbacks—the same

as our nugget seems likely—to my ideas it would be wrong if we was so much as to ask you.'

'Is that what you are full of then, and what makes you so mysterious? I did think that you knew me better; and I had a right to hope so.'

'Concerning of yourself alone is not what we must think of. You might do this, or you might do that, according to what you was told, or even more, according to what was denied you. For poor honest people, like Firm and me, to deal with such a case is out of knowledge. For us it is—go by the will of the Lord, and dead agin' your own desires.'

'But, dear Uncle Sam,' I cried, feeling that now I had him upon his own tenter-hooks, 'you rebuked me as sharply as lies in your nature for daring to talk about fate just now; but to what else comes your own conduct, if you are bound to go against your own desire? If you have such a lot of free will, why must you do what you do not like to do?'

'Well, well, perhaps I was talking rather large. The will of the world is upon us as well. And we must have respect for its settlements.'

'Now let me,' I said, with a trembling wish to have everything right and maidenly. 'I have seen so much harm from misunderstandings, and they are so simple when it is too late; let me ask you one or two questions, Uncle Sam. You always answer everybody. And to you a crooked answer is impossible.'

'Business is business,' the Sawyer said. 'My dear, I contract accordingly.'

'Very well. Then, in the first place, what do you wish to have done with me? Putting aside all the gossip, I mean, of people who have never even heard of me.'

'Why, to take you back to Saw-mill with us, where you always was so natural.'

'In the next place, what does your grandson wish?'

'To take you back to Saw-mill with him, and keep you there till death do you part, as chanceth to all mortal pairs.'

'And now, Uncle Sam, what do I wish? You say we all have so much free will.'

'It is natural that you should wish, my dear, to go and be a great lady, and marry a noble-

man of your own rank, and have a lot of little noblemen.'

'Then I fly against nature; and the fault is yours, for filling me so with machinery.'

The Sawyer was beaten, and he never said again that a woman cannot argue.

CHAPTER LVIII.

BEYOND DESERT, AND DESERTS.

From all the carnage, havoc, ruin, hatred, and fury of that wicked war, we set our little convoy forth, with passes procured from either side. According to all rules of war, Firm was no doubt a prisoner; but having saved his life, and taken his word to serve no more against them, remembering also that he had done them more service than ten regiments, the Federal authorities were not sorry to be quit of him.

He, for his part, being of a deep, retentive nature, bore in his wounded breast a sorrow which would last his lifetime. To me he said not a single word about his bitter fortune, and he could not bring himself to ask me whether I would share it. Only from his eyes sometimes I knew what he was thinking; and having passed through so much grief, I was moved with

deep compassion. Poor Firm had been trained by his grandfather to a strong, earnest faith in Providence, and now this compelled him almost to believe that he had been specially visited. For flying in the face of his good grandfather, and selfishly indulging his own stiff neck, his punishment had been hard and almost heavier than he could bear. Whatever might happen to him now, the spring and the flower of his life were gone; he still might have some calm existence, but never win another day of cloudless joy. And if he had only said this or thought about it, we might have looked at him with less sadness of our own.

But he never said anything about himself, nor gave any opening for our comfort to come in. Only from day to day he behaved gently and lovingly to both of us, as if his own trouble must be fought out by himself, and should dim no other happiness. And this kept us thinking of his sorrow all the more; so that I could not even look at him without a flutter of the heart, which was afraid to be a sigh.

At last upon the great mountain range,

through which we now were toiling, with the snow little more than a mantle for the peaks, and a sparkling veil for sunrise, dear Uncle Sam, who had often shown signs of impatience, drew me apart from the rest. Straightforward and blunt as he generally was, he did not seem altogether ready to begin, but pulled off his hat, and then put it on again, the weather being now cold and hot by turns. And while he did this he was thinking at his utmost, as every full vein of his forehead declared. And being at home with his ways, I waited.

'Think you got a-head of me? No, not you,' he exclaimed at last, in reply to some version of his own of my ideas, which I carefully made a nonentity under the scrutiny of his keen blue eyes. 'No, no, missy, you wait a bit. Uncle Sam was not hatched yesterday, and it takes fifty young ladies to go round him.'

'Is that from your size, Uncle Sam, or your depth?'

'Well, a mixture of both, I do believe. Now, the last thing you ever would think of, if

you lived to be older than Washington's nurse, is the very thing I mean to put to you. Only you must please to take it well, according to my meaning. You see our Firm going to a shadow, don't you? Very well, the fault of that is all yourn. Why not up and speak to him?'

'I speak to him every day, Uncle Sam, and I spare no efforts to fatten him. I am sure I never dreamed of becoming such a cook. But soon he will have Suan Isco.'

'Old Injun be darned. It's not the stomach, it's the heart as wants nourishment with yon poor lad. He looketh that pitiful at you sometimes, my faith, I can hardly tell whether to laugh at his newings or cry at the lean face that does it.'

'You are not talking like yourself, Uncle Sam. And he never does anything of the kind. I am sure there is nothing to laugh at.'

'No, no; to be sure not. I made a mistake. Heroic is the word, of course—everything is heroic.'

'It is heroic,' I answered, with some vexation at his lightness. 'If you cannot see it, I

am sorry for you. I like large things; and I know of nothing larger than the way poor Firm is going on.'

'You to stand up for him!' Colonel Gundry answered, as if he could scarcely look at me. 'You to talk large of him, my Lady Castlewood, while you are doing of his heart into small wittles! Well, I did believe, if no one else, that you were a straightforward one.'

'And what am I doing that is crooked now?'

'Well, not to say crooked, Miss 'Rema; no, no. Only onconsistent when squared up.'

'Uncle Sam, you're a puzzle to me to-day. What is inconsistent? What is there to square up?'

He fetched a long breath, and looked wondrous wise. Then, as if his main object was to irritate me, he made a long stride, and said, 'Soup's a-bilin' now.'

'Let it boil over, then. You must say what you mean. Oh, Uncle Sam, I only want to do the right.'

'I dessay, I dessay. But have you got the pluck, Miss? Our little missy would a' done

more than that. But come to be great lady—why, they take another tune. With much mind, of course it might be otherwise. But none of 'em have any much of that to spare.'

'Your view is a narrow one,' I replied, knowing how that would astonish him. 'You judge by your own experience only; and to do that shows a sad want of breadth, as the ladies in England express it.'

The Sawyer stared, and then took off his hat, and then felt all about for his spectacles. The idea of being regarded by a 'female' from a larger and loftier point of view, made a new sensation in his system.

'Yes,' I continued, with some enjoyment, 'let us try to look largely at all things, Uncle Sam. And supposing me capable of that, what is the proper and the lofty course to take?'

He looked at me with a strange twinkle in his eyes, and with three words discomfited me —'pop the question.'

Much as I had heard of woman's rights, equality of body and mind with man, and superiority in morals, it did not appear to me

that her privilege could be driven to this extent. But I shook my head till all my hair came down, and so if our constitutional right of voting by colour was exercised, on this occasion it claimed the timid benefit of ballot.

With us, a suggestion for the time discarded has often double effect by-and-by; and though it was out of my power to dream of acting up to such directions, there could be no possible harm in reviewing such a theory theoretically.

Now nothing beyond this was in my thoughts, nor even so much as that (safely may I say), when Firm and myself met face to face on the third day after Uncle Sam's ideas. Our little caravan, of which the Sawyer was the captain, being bound for Blue River and its neighbourhood, had quitted the Sacramento track, by a fork on the left, not a league from the spot where my father had bidden adieu to mankind. And knowing every twist and turn of rock, our drivers brought us at the camping-time almost to the verge of chaparral.

I knew not exactly how far we were come, but the dust-cloud of memory was stirring, and

though mountains looked smaller than they used to look, the things done among them seemed larger. And wandering forth from the camp to think, when the evening meal was over, lo! there I stood in that self-same breach or portal of the desert, in which I stood once by my father's side, with scared and weary eyes, vainly seeking safety's shattered landmark. The time of year was different, being the ripe end of October now; but though the view was changed in tint, it was even more impressive. Sombre memories, and deep sense of grandeur, which is always sad, and solemn lights, and stealing shadows, compassed me with thoughtfulness. In the mouth of the gorge was a gray block of granite, whereupon I sat down to think.

Old thoughts, dull thoughts, thoughts as common as the clouds that cross the distant plain, and as vague as the wind that moves them—they please and they pass, and they may have shed kindly influence, but what are they? The life that lies before us is, in some way too, below us, like yon vast amplitude of plain; but

it must be traversed foot by foot, and laboriously travailed, without the cloudy vapouring or the high-flown meditation. And all that must be done by me, alone, with none to love me, and (which for a woman is so much worse) nobody ever to have for my own, to cherish, love, and cling to.

Tier upon tier, and peak over peak, the finest mountains of the world are soaring into the purple firmament. Like Northern lights, they flash, or flush, or fade into a reclining gleam; like ladders of heaven, they bar themselves with cloudy air; and like heaven itself they rank their white procession. Lonely, feeble, puny, I look up with awe and reverence; the mind pronounces all things small compared with this magnificence. Yet what will all such grandeur do—the self-defensive heart enquires—for puny, feeble, lonely me?

Before another shadow deepened, or another light grew pale, a slow, uncertain step drew near, and by the merest chance it happened to be Ephraim Gundry's. I was quite surprised, and told him so; and he said that he also was

surprised at meeting me in this way. Remembering how long I had been here, I thought this most irrational, but checked myself from saying so, because he looked so poorly. And more than that, I asked him kindly how he was this evening, and smoothed my dress to please his eye, and offered him a chair of rock. But he took no notice of all these things.

I thought of the time when he would have behaved so very differently from this, and nothing but downright pride enabled me to repress vexation. However, I resolved to behave as kindly as if he were his own grandfather.

'How grand these mountains are!' I said. 'It must do you good to see them again. Even to me it is such a delight. And what must it be to you, a native?'

'Yes, I shall wander from them no more. How I wish that I had never done so!'

'Have men less courage than women?' I asked, with one glance at his pale worn face. 'I owe you the debt of life; and this is the place to think and speak of it. I used to talk freely of that, you know. You used to like to

hear me speak; but now you are tired of that, and tired of all the world as well, I fear.'

'No, I am tired of nothing, except my own vile degradation. I am tired of my want of spirit, that I cannot cast my load. I am tired of my lack of reason, which should always guide a man. What is the use of mind, or intellect, reasoning power, or whatever it is called, if the whole of them cannot enable a man to hold out against a stupid heart?'

'I think you should be proud,' I said, while trembling to approach the subject which never had been touched between us, 'at having a nature so sensitive. Your evil chance might have been anybody's, and must of course have been somebody's. But nobody else would have taken it so—so delightfully as you have done.'

'Delightfully! Is that the word you use? May I ask who gets any delight from it?'

'Why, all who hate the Southern cause,' I replied, with a sudden turn of thought, though I never had meant to use the word; 'surely that needs no explanation.'

'They are delighted, are they? Yes, I can

very well believe it. Narrow-minded bigots! Yes, they are sure to be delighted. They call it a just visitation, of course, a righteous retribution. And they hope I may never get over it.'

'I pray you to take it more gently,' I said; 'they are very good men, and wish you no harm. But they must have their own opinions; and naturally they think them just.'

'Then all their opinions are just wrong. They hope to see me go down to my grave. They shall not have that pleasure. I will outlive every old John Brown of them. I did not care two cents to live just now. Henceforth I will made a point of it. If I cannot fight for true freedom any more, having ruined it perhaps already, the least I can do is to give no more triumph to its bitter enemies. I will eat and drink, and begin this very night. I suppose you are one of them, as you put their arguments so neatly. I suppose you consider me a vile slave-driver?'

'You are very ill,' I said, with my heart so full of pity that anger could not enter; 'you are very ill, and very weak. How could you

drive the very best slave now—even such a marvel as Uncle Tom?'

Firm Gundry smiled; on his lean dry face there shone a little flicker, which made me think of the time when he bought a jest-book, published at Cincinnati, to make himself agreeable to my mind. And little as I meant it, I smiled also, thinking of the way he used to come out with his hard-fought jokes, and expect it.

'I wish you were at all as you used to be,' he said, looking at me softly through the courage of his smile, 'instead of being such a grand lady.'

'And I wish you were a little more like yourself,' I answered without thinking; 'you used to think always there was nobody like me.'

'Suppose that I am of the same opinion still? Tenfold, fiftyfold, a millionfold?'

'To suppose a thing of that sort is a little too absurd, when you have shown no sign of it.'

'For your own dear sake I have shown no sign. The reason of that is too clear to explain.'

'Then how stupid I must be, not to see an atom of it!'

'Why, who would have anything to say to

me—a broken-down man, a fellow marked out for curses, one who hates even the sight of himself? The lowest of the low would shun me.'

He turned away from me, and gazed back towards the dismal, miserable, spectral desert, while I stood facing the fruitful, delicious, flowery Paradise of all the world. I thought of the difference in our lots, and my heart was in misery about him. Then I conquered my pride, and my littleness, and trumpery, and did what the gentle, sweet Eve might have done. And never have I grieved for that action since.

With tears on my cheeks quite undissembled, and a breast not ashamed of fluttering, I ran to Firm Gundry, and took his right hand, and allowed him no refuge from tender wet eyes. Then before he could come to see the meaning of this haste—because of his very high discipline—I was out of his distance, and sitting on a rock, and I lifted my eyes, full of eloquence to his; then I dropped them, and pulled my hat forward, and said, as calmly as was possible, 'I have done enough. The rest remains with you, Firm Gundry.'

The rest remained with him. Enough that I was part of that rest; and if not the foundation or crown of it, something desirous to be both, and failing (if fail it ever does) from no want of trial. Uncle Sam says that I never fail at all, and never did fail in anything, unless it was when I found that blamed nugget, for which we got three wagon-loads of green-backs; which (when prosperity at last revives) will pay perhaps for greasing all twelve wheels.

Jowler admits not that failure even. As soon as he recovered from canine dementia, approaching very closely to rabies, at seeing me in the flesh once more (so that the Sierra Nevada rang with avalanches of barking), he tugged me to the place where his teeth were set in gold, and proved that he had no hydrophobia. His teeth are scanty now, but he still can catch a salmon, and the bright zeal and loyalty of his soft brown eyes, and the sprightly elevation of his tail are still among dogs as pre-eminent as they are to mankind inimitable.

Now the war is past, and here we sit by the

banks of the soft Blue River. The early storm and young conflict of a clouded life are over. Still out of sight there may be yet a sea of troubles to buffet with; but it is not merely a selfish thought, that others will face it with me. Dark mysteries have been cleared away by being confronted bravely; and the lesson has been learned that life (like Californian flowers) is of infinite variety. This little river, ten steps wide, on one side has all lupins, on the other side all larkspurs. Can I tell why? Can anybody? Can even itself, so full of voice and light, unroll the reason?

Behind us tower the stormy crags, before us spreads soft tapestry of earth, and sweep of ocean. Below us lies my father's grave, whose sin was not his own, but fell on him, and found him loyal. To him was I loyal also, as a daughter should be; and in my lap lies my reward—for I am no more Erema.

THE END.

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